

~ Badges and Needles ~

by Warrior Angel

Beta work by KDarblyne

Violence Disclaimer: This story contains scenes of violence.

Love/Sex Disclaimer: This story contains a love/sexual relationship between two consenting adult women.

Comments: Please feed the bard! warriorangel24@hotmail.com

Author Note:

I had the first version of this story removed because I got an offer from a very generous person who has been more than a beta to me. She has listened to my muses and helped me to understand their ways as any great teacher would.

Thank you KD.

The main characters traveled from the original to this beta version and those of you who started reading the first version will recognize them. For those who didn't, this is an opportunity you can't miss.

Lot's of action and emotional struggle working as the perfect backdrop for a love story.

I hope you like it!

Remember, feedback is always welcomed.

Thanks,

Warrior Angel

Part 1

Tall, dark, and deadly beautiful, detective Samantha Mathews looked more like a model than the brilliant police officer she was. Three months ago she and her partner Lieutenant Mark Stevens were recruited by the NYC narcotics division to work on a joint operation with the homicide department; an operation that Sam was sure to be the one that would define the notorious Big Ed's future. For the last two months, Samantha and Mark had worked undercover learning everything about the organization and the drug selling process. Their hard work had finally paid off when a buy was set up in order to catch the dealer. That's the reason why they've been squatting behind a stack of boxes for what seemed like an eternity. Samantha looked over to her partner just as a muscle spasm caused her to grimace.

"So, it's not just me," Mark whispered as he shifted uncomfortably. "God, I think my ass fell asleep."

"Really?" Sam kept her voice low. "By the smell I could swear it was dead already."

It wasn't until Mark opened his mouth to reply that their earpieces came to life.

"Bird flew in." informed one of the agents spread all over the building where the transaction was taking place.

Sam squared her shoulders and her eyes locked with Mark's as they both entered into alert mode.

"Lewis, what have we got out back?" The captain barked over the radio from the safety of his surveillance van.

"All clear, sir."

"Matthews, what do you get?"

Sam honed in on the group assembling around a small table. "We've got a briefcase," she whispered into the hidden microphone in her sleeve, "but no drugs yet."

"Stevens, can you see anything? We're waiting for visual confirmation."

As if on cue, Mark watched Big Ed's bodyguard open the suitcase in his hands.

"Suitcase is opening. We got white powder."

"Heroin," the Captain seethed. "Move in!"

On his command a group of twelve police officers burst into the room.

"Get down! Keep your hands where I can see them!" A chorus of disjointed agents filled the room.

Surprised by the action, the pusher and his gang did as they were told. That is, all but one. In a daring move, Big Ed's bodyguard shoved an agent abruptly and took his gun causing all hell to break loose.

When the bullets started flying, Sam found herself trapped in the middle of a war zone with people running for cover.

"This is going nowhere," Sam whispered. "We need backup." She stood up and fired twice over the pile of shipping crates that acted as her shield.

"It's on the way," Mark replied, blasting a few rounds to give Sam time to reload her gun.

"Damn it!" Sam smacked a new clip in the chamber of her semi-auto pistol. "I can't let that bastard get away, not after all this work." She took a deep breath, stood up, and fired again. That's when Sam caught a glimpse of Big Ed Thomas, a.k.a the Candy Man, trying to sneak out of the building. *Oh no, you don't.*

"Big Ed is moving," Sam informed her partner. "I'm going after the bastard. No matter what, he is going down today."

"I got your back." Mark sprang up and fired providing cover as she started after Big Ed. "Be careful, Sam." He whispered more to himself than to the retreating brunette.

Scrambling for freedom, Big Ed took the fire escape then jumped over a six foot wall to avoid the police officers guarding the back exit. Sam came right behind him and saw that Ed was so focused in getting away that he didn't notice her on his tale.

Skipping the last few rungs of the fire escape, Samantha dropped to the ground running and caught up with him

"Freeze, Ed, the game is over for you." Sam held him at gunpoint.

"I should have known you were a cop," Big Ed hissed. His gaze was more like daggers pointed directly at her. "You're too damn smart to be a bimbo. Bitch!" Ed searched for a way out. Noticing the smirk breaking across Big Ed's face, Sam followed his gaze. A chill ran down her spine when she spied a young cop trying to surprise the Candy Man.

Sam's eyes bulged when she saw Big Ed spin and aim his gun in the over zealot recruit's direction. The sight of the young cop's blur and the sound of the trigger clicking sent a bolt of electricity through Samantha's body. In an impulsive reaction, she launched herself in the rookie's direction.

"JAKE, GET DOWN!"

The sound of the shot split the air and Sam saw Jake bracing for the impact. The last thing she felt was her body slamming the rookie into the ground when she landed on top of him.

From the top of the wall, Mark aimed his gun and pulled the trigger several times in rapid succession. He watched blankly as Big Ed's body wavered backward with each hit and fell to the ground.

The lieutenant stood frozen, his weapon still aimed at his target until no further movement was noted, he slowly lowered his gun in triumphant victory.

"We did it, Sam. We got the bastard!"

Mark's declaration was met only by the sound of a few muffled shots coming from the battle

going on inside the warehouse.

"Didn't you hear me, Sam? We got him. Ed's not such a big man now." Mark holstered his weapon and looked to the mound of intertwined officers. "Sam, cut the crap. I know you're just trying to freak me out." His words trailed off and he pushed forward toward the heap of cops on the floor. Seeing no motion, he fought back his worst fears and hedged slowly forward. His eyes were drawn to the color red.

"Oh, Jesus. No!" A wave of desperation ran through the lieutenant as he gazed at his partner and the rookie lying motionless in a growing pool of blood.

Mark grabbed the radio attached to his belt and hastily keyed it. "Officer down! I repeat, officer down! Get an ambulance here right away."

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Part 2

Strong and focused since the day she entered medical school, Ann Thomas soon became one of the best emergency physicians in New York City. Her good interpersonal skills and abilities for leadership granted her the position as chief of ER at County General Hospital. The doctor always had a special talent for diplomacy; she knew very well how to talk her way out of stressful situations.

"Peter, what's with the attitude? I know, we have a lot to work on, but you don't see my blonde hair turning gray, do you? Besides, I got us six months to turn this place around. It's an improvement!" Ann kept one eye on the status of the elevator as she delicately steered the conversation with her colleague.

"I know..." Dr. O'Neil shook his head in exasperation, "but what's gonna be different in six months?"

"Things change, Pete. Who knows, maybe six months from now you're the new Chief of Staff," Ann trailed off as she headed toward the opening elevator doors.

The expression on Peter's face became one of puzzlement and he hurriedly followed her to the open elevator. "What's that supposed to mean?"

Ann smiled graciously. "Let's just say that your friend, Mr. Wilson and I, we tend not to see eye to eye."

Peter smirked, extending a hand to keep the door from closing. "Does anybody heading up a busy emergency department get along with the hospital manager?" He opened his mouth to speak further on the subject but his pager did it for him. "Damn! I've got to go but we'll finish this up later," he said leaving the elevator to go.

Ann shook her head and moved back toward the front desk. She examined the board, then picked up a few charts to review.

"Resident evaluations" the words floated on the air. "When are they due?"

Ann looked around for the source of the question. Seeing no one within her five feet, she cautiously replied as she circled the desk. "Next Monday."

A large mound of shifting papers drew her eye as the mystery of the disembodied voice was solved.

One of her attending doctors came into view, huddled behind the desk, diligently engaged in paperwork. "Dr. Chou, are you hiding from someone?"

"God, I forgot how much paperwork this is," he mumbled. "I've got really sick patients on my service and every time I turn around there's a resident staring me up in my face."

"We've been there and done that, my dear Chou. That's how we learned." Ann cocked her head to a side and smiled sarcastically. "And now, we are on the other side of the desk. That's the price we pay for being real doctors."

"When you put it that way, it sounds so logical" Chou grimaced. "But I still don't have to like it."

"No one said we did." Ann put the chart back in place. "It just comes with the territory, like being woken out of a sound sleep at 2am."

"Help, please somebody help!"

Ann looked up to see a young man carrying a passed out teenager boy over his shoulder. "Speak of the devil," she muttered.

"I need some help, my brother's been stabbed. Please help me." Expressive eyes bore his pain, "Please."

True to her nature, Ann reacted by grabbing a gurney and pushing it closer to the blood soaked duo.

"Here, put him on this stretcher."

"Please do something." He begged as he followed her command.

Ann was touched by the sight of this bulky man crying like a baby pleading over his brother's life.

"It is okay, Mr....?"

"Gordon, Jeremy Gordon"

"It's okay." Ann stepped away from the stretcher "Go on, Lily." She nodded to the nurse by her side. "Chou, I need another hand here" She motioned for the nurse to rush the patient into a trauma room and turned her attention back to the hysterical man.

"Mr. Gordon, we'll do whatever we can to save your brother, I promise"

"He's only thirteen, doctor, you can't let him die. He's too young to die!" Jeremy trailed along after Ann. "Can you stop the bleeding?"

Lily quickly intercepted him when he crossed the threshold of the trauma room. "Sir, you're going to have to step back, right now!" The nurse escorted the man out of the room as another doctor slipped by.

"Hey, Thomas, I need a consult in trauma three." The white-coated man stood at the door waiting for an answer.

"Sorry, Ben, I have a life trying to bleed out here. Maybe O'Neil can help you out," Ann offered donning her gloves. "Alright people, what do we have here?"

"Stab wounds to the left neck and chest, with two more to the belly." Dr Chou declared as he continued examining the injuries.

"Pulse ox is eighty-three." Lily informed them.

"Alright, let's intubate him. Number eight ET tube, please." Ann requested. "Better call respiratory while you're at it." Ann concentrated on inserting the breathing tube. "I'm in. Bag him."

Chou looked to his chief of staff. "Chest tube?"

"What's his blood pressure?"

Lily checked the monitor. "Its 90 over 50."

"Central line first, then the chest tube." Ann replied. "Hang two units of O negative blood for the patient on the rapid infuser." Ann commanded then looked up to see a nurse standing at the trauma room's door.

"Yes, Sheryl?"

"Dr Thomas, they need a doc in radiology for an IV contrast injection. Patient's name's Dennis."

"Whose patient?"

"I think Rosenberg's," Lily piped in, spiking a bag of blood, then hanging it.

"Sorry, but I'm a little too busy right now. You're going to have to find him." Ann probed the incision she'd just made on the left side of the patient's chest to insert a chest tube. She glanced over to her colleague. "How are you coming with that line?"

"I've got it," Chou reached for the IV tubing in Lily's hand.

"Make it quick, Chou. This kid doesn't have all day. Lily, call the OR and tell them we'll be up in less than five."

"Minutes or hours?" Chou said with lilt.

"Minutes, Lily." Ann glared at the man opposite her. "Always minutes. And for that remark, Dr. Chou, you just won a nice trip upstairs to accompany the patient." She connected the chest tube to its container and secured it in place. "Come on, Chou, tic-toc, tic-toc!"

"I'm done, I'm done!" Chou hastily tied the last knot and clipped the suture material.

"Good, that will give you just about three and a half minutes to get there." Ann turned toward Lily as if prompting her.

"OR will be prepared and waiting for us." Lily grabbed her portable monitor and within seconds, the patient was connected to it. "I'm all set."

"Ready or not, I'm coming," Chou grimaced as they started out of the room. "Enjoy your rest, Ann."

Ann snapped off her gloves, shooting them into a wastebasket and snorted. "As if!" She then turned to see a stretcher surrounded by paramedics and police officers rushing in through the emergency doors.

"What do we have here?" she questioned approaching the group.

"Police Officer with a gunshot wound to the back. No exit wound." One of the paramedics informed while rolling their patient into a trauma room followed by two nurses and a resident.

"All right, on my count," Ann donned a new pair of gloves and positioned herself at the head of the patient. "One, two, three, go." She helped the paramedics move the lifeless body from the stretcher to the bed. "What happened?"

"We got a call for an officer down," one medic started.

Mark stepped forward trying hard not to shake. "We were making a bust when all hell broke loose."

"I'd say that's pretty apparent." Ann visually assessed her newest patient. The doctor's gaze fell on the woman's face. *God, she's beautiful.* Ann's eyes traced every line, every contour of the brunette's strong features. In that moment, all the noise and chaos of the emergency room just faded. Ann felt a sudden, powerful urge to touch the patient. She reached out and felt the woman's neck. The pulse seemed to be growing weaker by the second.

"The perp got the drop on one of our guys and Sam here" Mark nodded toward his co-worker and friend lying motionlessly on the stretcher "tried her best to get him out of harm's way."

"Me! It was me Sam was trying to save." Jake shrugged off a supportive hand and stepped forward from the crowd of officers. "I don't deserve it. I'm not her partner. I'm only a rookie," he began to trail off. "It all happened so fast."

The outburst snapped Ann out of her reverie and back into doctor mode.

"How long has she been down?"

"I...I lost all sense of time when..." Mark hesitated, starrng off into space.

"Twenty minutes," Jake supplied the information as best as he could. "A half an hour at the most since she threw herself in front of the bullet that was meant for me."

"Did she fall? Hit her head perhaps?" Ann's questions were direct as were her fingers moving from one pulse point to another on her patient.

"I don't think so." Jake looked away from Sam as a nervous smile flickered across his lips. "You might say I cushioned her fall. It should be me lying on that table, not her. You got to help her, Doc." Tears started to well up in his eyes. Suddenly Jake stripped his shirtsleeve from his arm. "Here, take my blood if she needs it." He looked over to Ann as did the rest standing in the police ranks, some reaching to roll up their sleeves as well.

"Its okay buddy, you did nothing wrong." Mark placed a comforting hand on the young cop's shoulder. Visually shaken, the rookie was enfolded by a wall of blue as his colleagues reached out to steady his resolve.

"Come on guys let's get out of the doctor's way. Let her save Sam." Mark felt his guts turning as he took another glance at his friend and saw her getting paler. "You will, won't you Doc?"

"We'll give it our all." Ann reassured him with a nod as reluctantly, one by one, the police officers and paramedics filed out of the room until there was only Mark standing by the door. Ann watched Sam's pulse weakening gradually as if her life had been hanging on her colleagues support. The moment Mark stepped out of the room the heart monitor displayed nothing but a flat line.

"We've got a traumatic arrest here, people." Ann quickly enlisted the aid of her staff. "Mike, get two units of blood running with more on the way. David, cut her clothing off, it's time to see what we've got going on inside. Sarah, set up a thoracotomy tray, then call the OR and tell them to assemble the Thoracic team. We'll be coming up as soon as we have a pulse back."

Ann positioned herself at her patient's right side. Once Sam's chest was bared,

The doctor used a scalpel to make the incision. "Rib spreader."

Ann quickly maneuvered her fingers until they reached her ultimate goal, Sam's heart.

"There's no blood in her heart. Run everything we got wide open. I need more volume and space, so I can see."

The team reacted, giving Ann exactly what she asked for. After a few more cranks of the rib spreaders and a little help from the resident, Ann was able to view the organ.

"There's our problem," Ann declared noting the stream of blood coming out of Sam's heart. Without a second thought, Ann used her pinky to plug up the hole. The blood started filling up Sam's heart again, giving it a more normal appearance cradled in Ann's hand.

"Beginning heart massage," Ann declared as she squeezed and released trying to establish a rhythm. "Come on, dammit! We need more volume." Her will was evident in the tone of her voice. "I'm not losing you again"

"Do you know this patient Dr. Thomas?" David asked curiously

"Me? No. Why?"

"You said 'again'"

"Did I?"

The resident and the two nurses in the room nodded positively.

"I don't know where that came from," Ann shrugged musing more to herself than anyone around

her as she fought of the intriguing feeling that threatened to overwhelm her. "Come on, we've got a job to do."

Seeing the nearly empty bags of blood, Mike spearheaded the battle to increase the volume by spiking a bag of Ringer's Lactate and hanging it on the rapid infuser, then reaching for more. "Two units of blood in and another one on the way,"

"OR's ready when we are," Sarah alerted the team.

"Now all we need is ..." Ann held her breath when she saw the electric impulse flash across the heart monitor. "Life," she whispered watching the irregular pulsations slowly develop into a precarious rhythm.

"Sterile drape," Ann motioned toward the gapping hole in Sam's chest. "Let's pack her up. We're heading to the OR," Ann declared triumphantly, as she scrambled onto the stretcher and straddled her patient's hips, all the while plugging the hole in Sam's heart.

* * *

The sound of the trauma room doors opening startled the group. Mark's eyes almost came out of their sockets at the sight of the petit blonde doctor straddling Sam as the gurney was whisked into an awaiting elevator.

"You'll be ok my friend. You'll be okay" Mark repeated the wishful sentence over and over again. However, the lieutenant's mantra wasn't soothing at all to Jake. Instead, it made his stomach churn. For a split of a second the rookie felt as if the angel of death himself had passed by and gone straight to the ghostly pale Sam. Tears started cascading freely from the young man's eyes at the realization of what could have been. "That should have been me."

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Part 3

C-C-Cold.

The chilly atmosphere sent goose bumps running up and down Sam's arms, causing her to shiver.

Where am I?

She opened her eyes but was unable to see clearly. Instead, her heavy lidded vision revealed half images and swirling colors that created a kaleidoscopic blur of reds and grays.

Oh, Jesus Christ!

She tried blinking repeatedly but it didn't help to clear her vision. Now the colors alternated between dark and lighter shades of gray and red.

I really need to stop partying. Wait, I don't party.

Sam forced her eyes wide open to clear her vision but it remained unfocused.

What the hell is going on?

She blinked, squinted, and even squeezed her eyes tight trying to make out anything through the blur.

Oh this is bad...really, really bad.

Her instincts were crying out for her to focus.

Alright don't panic, use your other senses.

Slowly, she concentrated on the environment around her. This pungent smell assaulted her nose; it was something like a strong anti-septic mixed with a cinnamon scent.

What is this smell? What about this freaking beeping sound?

Her rational detective senses were starting to kick in.

This isn't my room and since I don't do sleepovers...

"Ms Mathews?"

Sam attempted to reply but was thwarted by something scratching her throat.

What the fuck?

"Ms Mathews?"

Sam turned toward the voice and was met with the outline of an angel.

Oh, shit! Don't tell me I've screwed myself to death.

"Samantha, when I count to three, I need you to cough."

Cough? I don't want to cough.

"Alright Samantha, I need you to cough now"

I don't need to...

Suddenly, the tickle at the back of her throat turned more painful.

Alright, enough! I'll cough. I'll... The sound of her own raspy coughing sent shudders through her body.

"It's okay Samantha. I pulled the tube out of your throat. It will ease your discomfort"

You call ripping my throat out a discomfort? Maybe this isn't heaven after all.

Sam felt cold fingers roaming and poking her body.

Hey! Stop touching me. Why are you tying that around my arm? Ouch! Stop that your moron. It's hurting...that's right, let it go. That's better, thank you!

Sam tried once again to focus her vision but the figures moved away from her.

Hey, come back here!

The light around her began to fade.

Where the hell am I anyway?

Sam didn't find her answers as her eyelids grew too heavy to keep open and her world faded to black.

* * *

It was pre-dawn when Dr. Thomas walked to the admit desk area and looked over the board.

"Hernandez, the patient in exam one has been here since eleven o'clock with left flank pain." Ann handed him the chart. "You might want to check that out."

"I'm on it, chief." The resident took the file and walked off.

"Hey Sarah," Ann stifled a yawn. "I'm going to take a break. Page me if anything comes up."

Ann waited to see the nurse acknowledge before heading toward the elevator. Her fingers automatically moved to push the habitual button but something made her hesitate. On impulse she pressed the fourth floor button. "Just for curiosity sake," Ann first rationalized, then used both hands to massage her tensed shoulders while rolling her head from side.

What am I doing? I should be getting some sleep.

Something about that patient intrigued Ann, but she couldn't put her finger on it. She replayed the previous day's trauma room scenario in her mind until a puzzling phrase reverberated time and again, *'I'm not losing you again'*.

Where did that 'again' come from? Have we met before?

Her musing stopped as did the elevator and Ann departed.

"Hey Jack," she greeted the lone male nurse sitting at the station. "I didn't know you were working up here tonight."

"I'm not." He shook his head. "I'm covering for a friend. What about you, Doctor Thomas, have you been riding anymore patients up to the OR today?"

"Nope," Ann pursed her lips fully aware that her teasing was just getting started. "As a matter of fact, I'm a bit curious about that patient I...uh...'rode' earlier." She put her forearms on the desk and pushed her body forward trying to view the computer screen. "How is she doing?"

"Let me see," the nurse keyed a few words before reading. "Samantha Mathews, age thirty two, gunshot wound to the back, rode in by..." Jack chaffed.

Ann hung her head, hiding behind a veil of blonde hair.

"Just kidding," Jack teased trying to soften the blow.

"I'm not going to live that one down, am I?"

"Nope!" The smug look on Jack's face said more than his short reply.

"I didn't think so," Ann murmured.

Jack turned the screen so Ann could also read it. "The skinny is that the bullet's out and the patient's stable." He looked up into questioning green eyes and sensed what the doctor wanted to know. "Recovery room," he pointed the direction.

"Thanks, Jack. You're a doll."

* * *

Inquisitive eyes searched the dim lighting of the room.

Why is everything so white? What is this place? What's going on?

Sam's thoughts turned suddenly inward when she swallowed.

Christ! I feel like shit. I must've been drugged.

An uneasy feeling alarmed Sam as she pushed her body up. It seemed as though something or someone was preventing her to move.

I have to quit this one night stand stuff. Alright, I'll play the bathroom card, it always works.

Okay baby time to move.

"I have... I need..." Exhausted, Sam dropped her head back down to the pillow in surrender.
"...to go."

"Don't try to get up. You have a catheter in place. Trust me, it's only a sensation."

Although barely heard, Sam acknowledged the compassionate sounding voice anyway.

That voice. It seems so...familiar but in an odd sort of way.

"How are you feeling?"

Yep, I definitely heard it before.

Sam clung to that recognition as if her life depended on it. She turned her head and saw the backlit apparition of an angel.

Oh yeah, this is definitely heaven.

"Am I dead?" Sam worked hard to get the question out but it came in little more than a raspy whisper.

"Not anymore."

"What?"

"You were shot but we brought you back."

"Were there many angels with you?"

"No. Well, I don't know who else was there aside from me and a few of my staff."

The voice grew closer to the point that Sam swore she felt someone breathing on her ear.

"I'm a doctor, by the way."

Sam opened her eyes and the only thing she saw was the sweet smile on an angel's glowing face.

"Doctor Angel," she babbled somewhat incoherently, feeling safe and secure in her angel's soothing presence.

My beautiful angel! You found me, love. I'm finally home.

Sam's inner voice stilled with the engulfing darkness as her weary body slipped into a healing slumber.

* * *

Why do you look so familiar, Samantha Mathews? Better yet, why do I feel so comfortable around you?

Lost in her thoughts, Ann took the patient's hand in hers and felt an overwhelming sense of warmth emanating from their touch.

"That's odd." She used her free hand to feel the patient's forehead for a fever. When none was found, it made Ann feel rather foolish.

"I must be really tired."

Ann gingerly let go of Sam's hand, then inched the blanket over the patient's exposed arm before turning to leave. The doctor stopped by the door and apprehensively glanced back at the patient. Again a disturbing feeling of familiarity washed over her. Too tired to think any more about it, Ann shook it off, then turned and exited.

* * *

Oh, God! Is this a hangover?

Sam pursed her lips to form an audible question.

"Ow!" She quickly attempted to moisten her parched lips. Her attention slowly spread to the environment surrounding her. Melodic beeps and astringent smells filled the room.

There's that freaking beeping again. I don't know what's worse it or the smell.

Searching the room, she found the source of the sound, a heart monitor.

"What the hell?" Sam tried to move her arm but found it tethered by an IV line connected to the back of her hand.

What did I get myself into this time?

"Good morning. How are you feeling?"

"Thirsty," Sam croaked.

"That's to be expected but it's something we can deal with." The nurse placed a straw to Sam's lips encouraging her to drink. "Here, take it slowly."

"Where am I? What happened?" Sam coughed around a swallow of water, a little anxious to put some puzzle pieces together.

"You're in a hospital. You were shot."

A chill ran up and down Sam's spine.

"Rest," the nurse tucked an extra blanket around the visually quivering woman. "I'll be back soon."

Shot? Oh boy, mom is gonna kill me!

She closed her eyes and began to doze off but a sentence echoing on her mind nagged her.

I'm not losing you again.

"That voice...I know that voice." Sam closed her eyes again forcing her memory but got nothing except some out of context sentences.

I'm a doctor. Beautiful angel. We brought you back. A doctor. An angel.

"Doctor Angel!" She whispered as realization hit her in a shock wave.

Is she real? Or is this some really bad dream I've been stuck in.

Sam tried hard to force the memories to come forward but disappointment flooded her when it came all blurred.

It's just a dream, Samantha, like your love life.

A despondent sigh accompanied the thought. She used a hand to rub her face as if the gesture would clear the bad memories.

You swore never to fall in love again, remember?

"But she could be real." She cast a glance at the door hoping to see her angel standing there.

Instead, she found a giant get-well-soon balloon bobbing over a very familiar face.

"Hey, look who has come back from the dead!" Mark greeted his friend with a big grin plastered on his face. "You scared the crap out of me, you know that? Don't you ever do that again, you hear me?"

"Sorry, buddy."

"You're sounding a little raspy there. You got a cold? Do you remember anything?"

"Vaguely. Everything is ..." Sam sighed. "What happened, Mark? I know I went outside to get Big Ed, but everything from there is all misty."

"One of the rookies tried to surprise Ed, but the sneaky son of bitch saw him and shot the guy..."

"Jake... he was gonna shoot Jake. He didn't hit him, did he?" The monitor started beeping faster when the events from the previous night started coming back to her.

"Take it easy, Sam." Mark put a soothing hand on his friend's shoulder. "The kid is fine. You took the bullet for him. You saved that rookie's life, you know. I might even consider recommending you for a medal," he joked.

"Yeah, it better be a good one." she reclined on the bed as her heartbeat slowed down. "What about Ed? Did he get away? Did we lose him?"

"Don't worry about him. He isn't a problem anymore!"

"You got him, didn't you, partner?"

"Multiple times."

"My hero!" Sam batted her eyelashes while faking a melodramatic sigh.

"Is this the part where I take you in my arms and kiss you senseless?" Sam hesitated for a second trying to decide whether her friend was being serious or just fooling with her.

Mark sensed his friend hesitation and decided to break the growing tension. "In your dreams, Matthews."

Sam breathed a sigh of relief when Mark released a throaty laugh.

"Now, take it easy and get some rest, okay?" He rearranged the pillows to make her more comfortable.

She shot a puzzled look at him. "What are you doing?"

"I'm helping you relax. Allison always does that when I'm sick or hurt."

"Do I look like your wife to you?" she slapped his hand annoyed.

"No, she's a delicate woman." he said rubbing the back of his hand.

"Bite me." She retorted bratty

"How are we doing this afternoon?"

The sickening sweet interruption caused both cops to eye the nurse coming through the door suspiciously.

"That depends on whom you mean by we and what you plan to do with that needle." Sam narrowed her eyes at the syringe in the nurse's hand.

"Yeah, who do you mean by 'we'?" Mark challenged the nurse with as much bravado as he could muster. "She's the sick one."

"I'm not sick." Sam glared at her partner. "I'm injured."

The nurse stifled a chuckle at the pairs' antics. "Don't worry. I'm injecting the medicine in your IV." The nurse crimped the tubing and did what she'd come to do then turned to leave. "I'll come back in twenty minutes to check on you." She hesitated at the door, giving Mark a stern look before turning a gentler gaze toward her patient. "You should try to get some sleep in the meantime."

Taking the nurse's hint, Mark attempted to draw their meeting to an end. "She's right, you need to rest. I better get going, Sam."

"Wait Mark, there's something bugging me."

"What? Is it a pain?" His frantic gaze surveyed Sam's face for a clue. "Do you want me to call the nurse back?"

"No! It's not that." She tried to calm her freaking out friend. "I'm fine. It's just that...I think I had a visitor last night."

"You think?" Mark rubbed his hand on his chest forcing his own heartbeat to return to a normal rate.

"Yeah, it's not very clear. Actually, nothing from last night is clear. I don't really remember the details." Sam pondered for a moment then promptly dismissed it with a wave of her hand.

"Maybe it was just a dream."

"Dreams are good. It means you're getting your rest." Mark paused as Sam stared straight ahead.

"I think a doctor came in to see me."

"So? They work here. They're allowed to."

"There was just something about 'em," Sam mused.

"You lost me." Mark furrowed his brows. "This is a hospital Sam. A doctor was here. Somebody call the police!"

"I know. It's just...she glowed, Mark. She glowed like an angel." Sam got a dreaming look on her face. "She has this sweetest voice that keeps echoing in my head."

"You're unbelievable Samantha, I've been worried sick about you all night, and you're here fantasizing about an angelic doctor," he shook his head, not believing his ears, "that you don't even know is real."

"I can't explain it. I never felt like this before."

Mark stared at his friend azure eyes and saw an unusual gleam.

"Alright, Sam." he sighed passing a nervous hand through his sandy colored hair. "What is it that you do remember?"

"Almost nothing. At least nothing solid." She closed her eyes as if trying to bring the images back to life. "I remember a soothing voice and the most beautiful smile I have ever seen."

Unaccustomed to seeing his partner so emotional, Mark was impressed by the sweetness in her voice. He felt a twinge of jealousy coursing through his system, but decided to push it down. Sam needed him and he was going to be there for her.

"Does this angel have a name?"

"If she gave me one, I can't remember it." She sighed in frustration letting her head sink into the pillow.

"Rest now, my friend. I'm on the case." Mark tenderly smoothed her hair as Sam began to doze off. "If this angel of yours is for good, you'll meet her again. I promise."

"Blonde hair," Sam murmured in a sleepy tongue. "She's got blonde hair."

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~ Badges and Needles ~
by Warrior Angel

Hey guys,

Thanks for the feedback! Keep doing it!

For disclaimers see Part 1

Part 4

Exhausted after working thirty hours straight, Ann was finally able to trade her lab coat for a casual jacket but it didn't stop her mind from continuing on with her job.

"Hey, Davis, did you see the patient in trauma seven?"

"Uh, yeah," the resident continued typing into the computer. "She agreed to voluntary admission."

"Thank you." Ann heard someone moving behind her and turned to see the ER head nurse.

"Hey Danni"

"Hi Doc, are you taking off now?"

"Yeah, I'm pretty beat" Ann stretched her arms above her head. "But you won't miss me cause I'll be back tonight for another shift."

"Night shift again?" Danni furrowed her brows in fake confusion "Gee, what's the point of being the boss then?"

"Funny, but we're short staffed."

"Taylor's still out of town?"

"Yes..." Ann watched a hasting nurse cross the desk and crouch behind it fussing with some boxes. "Lily, when is Taylor coming back?"

"Next Monday, I think" the nurse replied picking up a chart and a pair of latex gloves.

"Where did the nurses' favorite attending go?" Davis smirked obnoxiously without even taking

his eyes off the computer screen.

"He went to visit his dad in Ohio." Lily glared at the resident before circling the desk. Without altering her course a step or two, she dodged the doctor entering the ER.

Abruptly halted, his narrowed eyes followed Lily's retreating form. "We need some traffic signs in here." He turned to greet his co-workers. "Good morning, ladies and gentleman."

"Hi, Morgan," Ann replied.

"Hey, Ann, what are you still doing here? I thought you were off at three."

"A bus crashed on Central Park West." She tied her hair back and tucked in her scarf.

"How many did we get?"

"Six." She erased a few names from the board "Three went up to the OR. Two didn't require surgery as of yet and are at the Neuro ICU and one's waiting on a monitored bed for a 23 hour observation."

"Sounds like a full day," Morgan commented.

"Add to that spending the last three hours trying to keep the board running. Yes," Ann turned to survey her realm, "it was a very full day."

"What happened to the new attending that started last week?" Morgan questioned furrowing his brows.

"Couldn't keep up the pace," Lily said as she darted across the staff area. "He moved to Seattle."

"Smart guy" Morgan muttered as he straightened his backpack over his shoulder, his gaze falling on the young resident at the computer. "Davis, are you still on psychiatric rotation?"

"Yep and it's keeping me busy." He stood up and proceeded to move past Ann, offering her an obviously flirtatious wink. "But I can't wait to come back down here."

Unimpressed with his schoolboy tactics, Ann rolled her eyes and turned to address her relief.

"Alright Morgan, these are the critical ones." Ann handed him several charts. "I signed out the rest to Rosenberg." She turned to the only nurse at the desk. "Danni, will you give Mr. Jones a dose of Amoxicillin and discharge him, please?"

"Can do," Danni said flashing a confident smile, then walked off.

"Thank you." Ann took a final glance around the ER and headed for the door "Alright, I think I am out of here. See you guys at six o'clock this evening."

"No rush chief, I'll cover for you." Morgan offered.

Ann had barely exited the ER door when she heard her name being called out. She turned to see Danni coming toward her.

"Hey Thomas, I got us two tickets for the Knicks on Saturday. Do you think you can dodge dull boy?"

"Danni," Ann cautioned.

"Sorry." Danni's lips curved cynically. "Do you think you can dodge your lovely fiancé and have some fun?"

"I don't know." Ann bit the inside of her lip considering her options. "I kind of stood him up last night. I'm actually on my way to his office now to do some damage control."

"Damage control?" A look of shock registered on Danni's face. "You've got to be kidding me, Ann. Are you seriously considering marrying this guy?"

Ann's attempt to reply was cut off by Danni's raised hand.

"No, you listen to me. Think before deciding anything and for God's sake, don't rush to come to any sort of conclusions until your heart has a chance to speak its mind," Danni pled. "I know that you have been together for a long time and feel really comfortable around each other bla, bla, bla..."

"But," Ann interjected only to be over wrought again.

"I don't feel any sparkles around you. It's like you two are not meant to be more than good friends."

Ann looked stunned. "So you're saying we're no more than good friends with benefits?"

"Trust me, Ann, he's not the one." Danni tried to reason with her friend. "Answer me this, Ann. Does he haunt your dreams? Is he constantly creeping into your thoughts?"

"Is he my soulmate?" Ann supplied the next question. "Danni, you've been my best friend since high school. You know I never believed in that soulmate stuff. For me, love should be a consequence of a well developed friendship and Joe and I...well, we have such an easy way around each other."

"Easy could be taken two ways, Ann." Danni cocked her head to one side.

"And I suppose you would know that, wouldn't you?"

Danni rolled her eyes. "Could you please for once in your life get out of that doctor mode, Ann? You're thinking too logically for love. An 'easy way' around each other is not enough reason to marry someone and move across the ocean."

"Danni, I am a doctor. It's what I do. It's who I am."

"No, it's not. There's a living, beating heart in there." Danni pointed to Ann's chest. "I've seen it. All I'm asking is for you to think with your heart. Please, consider your options before accepting his proposal."

Ann looked away. "What if I've already said yes?"

The nurse threw both hands in the air and shook her head in exasperation.

"I'm not giving up that easily and you shouldn't either," Danni warned as Ann started to move away. "The right person for you is out there somewhere," she raised her voice to ensure that Ann heard her. "And I'm not resting until I put the two of you together."

Ann didn't even bother to turn around as she heard the words been shouted at her. Instead, she simply lifted a hand and waved with her back turned to her friend.

"Sparkles," Ann snorted "what am I, an electric wire? Give me a break." she muttered under her breath "I'm a woman of science. I don't buy this soulmate corny talk. My relationship is fine."

He's not the one...not the one. Danni's voice kept echoing in her head.

"Humph! How can she know that? How do you know someone is 'the one' anyway?"

But...do you love him...love him...love him?

"I feel warm and comfortable around him." She answered her inner voice. "Isn't that what love is supposed to feel like?" Ann sighed deeply as she nervously ran a hand through her hair.

"Besides, it's a trick question based on a quantitative answer. I don't know why I keep listening to Danielle. She never liked Joe anyway. He's a good man and would make a great husband."

But would he...would he...would he? This time it wasn't Danni's voice that was nagging her, it was her own. Ann sighed, deciding to ignore it.

"I'd better go and apologize for standing him up."

Ann knocked softly before poking her blonde head through the door.

"Hi"

"Hey stranger" Joe stood up and moved to the front of his desk, leaning against it as she walked towards him.

"I came to see how much you hate me." Ann flashed him her best apologizing smile.

"You know too well I could never hate you." Joe slipped an arm around Ann's waist and pulled her close. "I love you too much to even stay mad at you." He kissed her deeply.

Ann pulled back pleased. "Good, 'cause I hate when people stay mad at me."

"Smart ass!" He dove in for another kiss. "I missed you last night"

"Sorry. Yesterday was hectic." Ann broke their embrace and moved to the couch. "We had all sorts of cases: stabbings, gun shot wounds, and even a bus crash."

"Wow, a pretty exciting day by your standards, huh?"

"You betcha!" Ann snuggled against him. "We got a police officer, who threw herself in front of a bullet to save a colleague."

"Really? That is very heroic for a woman."

"What do you mean, for a woman?" Ann challenged with a raised brow. "I'd say for anybody. You don't see many people going superman to save a friend."

"Easy there tiger, I didn't mean to offend the gender." Joe lifted his hands in surrender. "So, is the hero alive?"

"Yes." Ann narrowed her eyes at his sarcastic tone but decided to let it slip. "She arrived pretty much lifelessly but we manage to get her back before we sent her to the OR."

"Nice work on your part." Joe studied the doubtful look on Ann's face. "But something is bugging you."

"I can't seem to overcome the feeling that I've met her before. I can't remember seeing her anywhere though. I think I'd remember if I'd seen her." The sentences came out almost in one single breath.

"Boy, she sure did a number on you."

Ann stared curiously at her fiancé. "Why are you saying that?"

"Cause you're babbling. You only babble when you're nervous or excited."

"Right, but I'm neither. I'm chalking it up to being really tired, that's all"

"Why don't you go home and get some rest?" He suggested tenderly. "I'm sure that it will help refresh your memory."

"I'm not gonna argue with your logic, Mr. Senior Accountant."

"Alright, but promise me that you'll find some time for me this weekend?"

"I promise." Ann gave him a chaste peck on his lips and left not even bothering to stifle her yawn.

The hot shower worked miracles on Ann's tensed muscles. She could feel her body finally relaxing, although her mind kept working in full speed. Danni's words had affected her more than she was willing to admit.

"Let it go, Ann" she said aloud while rinsing her hair "since when do you care about other people's opinion?"

Maybe she has a point.

"No she doesn't" she fought her rambling thoughts while stepping out of the shower. "Joe is not a 'friend with benefits'. I have feelings for him."

You have sex with him, her inner voice stated as a matter of fact.

"It's not just sex!" She shot back looking into the mirror. "There is more to it than that. We're..." Ann stared at her reflection searching for some evidence that would prove Danni wrong. Nothing came to mind except the reverberating echo of her friend's proclamation.

He's not the one.

Ann's sigh only emphasized the point that she was too tired to argue the subject any further.

"I'll deal with it later. I need to get some sleep." She retreated to her bed not even bothering to put pajamas on.

At 5 pm the alarm on Ann's cell phone went off, reminding her that she should be at the hospital within one hour. "Damn! I should have been a chef." She dragged herself out of bed. "But then again, I can't cook." She moved straight to the kitchen for her daily infusion of coffee.

"That's why I'm a doctor and taking the night shift again." She mumbled grumpily.

Mindlessly going through the motions of making coffee, Ann reviewed her past day's events where more than once, Danni's words ran through her mind.

"Why is this bothering me so much?" She poured a cup of steaming coffee and proceeded to get dressed.

"Maybe it's my fault that my relationship isn't...sparkling." She put on a pair of jeans and a blue sweater then moved to the door. "Maybe I should dedicate more time to Joe." Ann's lips turned upward in a naughty smile as she pondered her next step carefully.

"Screw it! I'm the Boss." She reached for the phone. Greeted by a male voice, she hastily set her plan in motion. "Morgan, I'm taking you up on the offer. You and Peter can hold the fort tonight. I hope you two have a good night in my place." Ann quickly terminated the call with a sultry smile. "I know I will. First stop though is the Sushi Bar. Nothing tastes better than raw fish while basking in an after glow."

Joe came from the kitchen carrying two glasses of wine, boastfully exposing his naked body.

"I have to admit I was quiet surprised when I saw you coming through the door tonight." He joined Ann who was seated on the floor by the coffee table wearing nothing but a super sized t-shirt.

"Good surprise or bad surprise?" Ann appreciated his figure as she fed him a piece of sashimi. *Who needs sparkles when you have this abdomen to look at?*

"Fantastic surprise," he admitted before sipping at his wine. "So was the sushi. If you ask me I think you had this all planned out."

"More like on the fly. I changed my shift with Peter at the last minute." Ann placed a delicate kiss on his lips. "Secretly, I think he's dying to be chief," she declared with a chuckle.

"So the position will be open?"

"Joe," she cautioned.

"I don't mean to push, but I need an answer, baby." He caressed her hair tenderly. "I'm flying to London next week, and the company is pressuring me for a decision."

"Joe, something this big," Ann hesitated still hearing Danni's words ringing in her ears. "I can't rush into anything. I'd have to give up everything I've built here, my friends, my career...my life."

"Sweetheart, I know it's a lot to ask, but it's a huge change for me too. I'll be the CEO of my division in Europe and within six months they'll be considering me for the vice president post at the parent company." He had a gleam of pride in his eyes.

"What about my career, Joe? I'm heading the busiest emergency department in the country. It wasn't easy to get there, especially being a woman."

"I know that, but there are hospitals in London, Ann. With your resume and your looks, you can get a job in no time," he explained logically. "Besides, I have connections. Why, I was talking to your father just the other day..."

"What?" Ann jerked back indignantly. "You've been talking to my father about me behind my back?"

"No. He called me and the subject... Well, the subject just came up. He knows people, Ann." Joe tried to reason with the fuming woman opposite him. "He's the best neurosurgeon in America and he's more than pleased to help you get a position in London's biggest hospital"

"I can't believe you." Ann shot up and began pacing the room. "You know damn well my father and I have," she hesitated searching for the right word as she paced, "issues."

"Nonsense, you've always been dad's little girl."

"Except for when I refuse to do, what he wants me to. I don't want to become a three-million-dollar surgeon like my father, Joe. I'm happy living my life in the trenches surrounded by common people. I'm happy doing what I do." She stopped pacing and took a deep breath. "I can't believe we're having this conversation again. I never used my father's influence. That's why I moved from LA and you know that." She looked straight into Joe's eyes. "I wanted to make it on my own, and not because I 'had connections'." Ann used her fingers to form quotes around her spoken words.

Joe's shoulders slumped in defeat. "I'm sorry. I don't know what I was thinking. It was stupid." He moved closer and slipped an arm around her waist. "I think I'm too anxious to start a life with you. Forgive me." He pulled her into a tight hug. "You've always been an independent woman..." his words trailed off.

Ann pushed back and stared at Joe. "And?"

"Quite frankly, it scares me sometimes," his words were little more than a whisper.

His honesty and sullen mood melted Ann's heart. "You don't have to be scared," she said gathering him into her arms. "We're friends, Joe. I'd never hurt you intentionally. I..." Ann sighed. "Well, you know me. I like to think things through. Just give me some time and I'll give your answer soon, I promise"

"Of course, I'm sorry." He cradled her in his arms and planted kisses on her neck. "I can't wait for you to become Mrs. Joseph Green."

Each touch of his hot tongue stoked Ann's libido, melting her frustration away. She closed her

eyes only to find herself staring at a strange yet familiar pair of blue eyes.

What the hell? Ann stiffened and tried to pull away but Joe's strong arms kept her in place. His attentive ministrations leading her down the path to arousal, forcing her to retreat behind closed eyes again. Instead of her usual warm rush of hypnotic colors, haunting blue eyes met her once more. Shocked by the odd reoccurrence, she hastily extracted herself from his arms as gently as she could.

"So, what are the plans for the weekend?" Ann did her best to sound casual even though it was all she could do to gain some sort of even keel.

Confused by the sudden turn of events, Joe answered with a quizzical look on his face. "I got two tickets for the Austrian Ballet Company presentation on Saturday."

Ann pondered for a moment, before casually looked away. "Aren't the Knicks playing on Saturday?"

"Since when do I care about basketball?" He started collecting their dishes from the coffee table. "I thought we could go to the ballet and then have dinner at a fancy restaurant. It could be a very elegant night, especially if you give me your answer." He wiggled his eyebrows playfully. Seeing Ann's doubtful face, he quickly added, "Not that I'm trying to push you. What do you say?"

Ann's shoulders slumped. She willed her voice to silence although she wanted to scream at the top of her lungs: *Ballet? Seriously, I just want to cheer madly and have some beer.*

"I have the night shift on Saturday, Honey, sorry." Ann dodged his offer deciding to take Danni's advice. *I need to have some fun.*

"Oh! Well, no worries," he shrugged, heading toward the kitchen. "I'll invite my mother instead."

Alone in the room, Ann closed her eyes and fought to regain her footing. Blue eyes greeted her again sending a jolt through her system as if she'd inserted her finger in an outlet. Ann crumpled onto the couch.

"What the hell just happen?" She threaded her fingers through her blonde locks in an attempt to clear her thoughts. "Where the hell did those eyes come from? I'm losing it. I must be losing my mind."

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Warrior Angel's Scrolls
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~ Badges and Needles ~
by Warrior Angel

Hey guys,

Thanks for the feedback! Keep doing it!

For disclaimers see Part 1

Part 5

Bored, that would be the best definition for Sam's state of mind. After being stuck in on a hospital bed for three days, Dr Krause's visits could be considered the highlight of her day.

"I must say I'm impressed, Samantha. I've never seen anyone recovering so fast during my twenty years as a surgeon."

"Does that mean I can get the hell outta here?" She sent him the best puppy dog's face she could muster. "Please doctor, I need to get back to work."

"Not so fast. A bullet to the heart is not something to be treated lightly, even for someone with such fantastic healing abilities."

"I'm telling you, I'm fine. Besides, I can't stand this hospital food any longer."

"And neither can I but that doesn't mean I get to leave early." He eyed her sternly. "We all have our jobs to do and right now, young lady, your job is allowing your body to heal..."

"But I am healing," Sam protested. "You said so yourself."

"But you're not healed all the way. Please, let me keep you under observation and if you continue showing signs of improvement, I'll discharge you by the end of the week." The physician held her gaze for a long moment before turning his attention to her chart. "How does that sound?"

"Do I have a choice?" Sam's question was followed by one sharply raised eyebrow.

"You're the detective. You tell me." Seeing the gleam in her eyes, he countered it with a solemn shake of his head. "No!"

"Drats!" Sam mood turned dour.

"For now you just relax and enjoy your stay. I'll come by tomorrow to check on you. If you'd like I'll write for you to have more donuts at your disposal since the menu isn't to your liking." He teased, putting her chart back in place and headed out of the room.

"Gee, thanks."

With one foot into the hall, he stopped and looked back at his pouting patient. "Oh, and if I were you, I'd quit nagging the nurses. You're making a name for yourself and it's not a very good one."

"Asshole!" Sam cursed the retreating doctor but truthfully, she was more annoyed at her pseudo imprisonment than anything. "Shit! If I continue lying here for another minute I'll lose my mind."

Feeling the need to move, Sam got out of bed and stood gazing out of the window at the ambulance bay below.

"I wonder if Doctor Angel is out there." Her voice was little more than a whisper that emulated the smile taking shape on her lips. "My Angel, are you real?" Sam closed her eyes trying to remember her angel's face, but no image appeared with the memory of the sweet voice echoing in her dreams.

"She's probably a hallucination induced by my altered state." Sam snorted, her gaze drifting to the horizon.

But what if she's real? The self-doubt registering in her inner voice echoed meekly until it grew into a full body crescendo.

The counter rhythm of a knock at the door finally stirred Sam out of her reverie. She turned to see a pair of blue eyes leading a male figure into her room.

Tall, dark and with a captivating smile, Leo Mathews was as near a spitting image of his sister as a sibling could be.

"Hey sis," Leo flashed an irresistible lopsided grin. "What are you doing up and out of bed?"

One look at his teasing sneer and Sam knew her brother was up to something. "Save it for someone who will fall for it, Leo. I'm not one of your bimbos."

"Don't you wish," he paused for a second. "Not!" He wiggled his eyebrows.

Sam met his challenge with one of her own signature glares then quickly gave in. "You got that right. So, why are you smiling like that?"

"I asked my question first."

"I was sore and wanted to stretch my legs." She said walking back to bed. "Your turn, what's with the smirk?"

"I have good news and bad news for you. What do you want first?"

"I'm not in a mood to play games, Leo." She warned.

"Okay, it's your funeral." he shrugged not the least bit intimidated by her grumpiness.

"Fine. Give me the good news first then." Sam rested her head on the pillow. "I could use some good news."

"I spoke to your doctor. He said he's going to discharge you by... "

"The end of the week," Sam finished it for him. "Christ, Leo, if that's the good news, you better try again."

Leo's good natured smile melted and was quickly replaced by a look of confusion when he met Sam's deadly stare. Suddenly his outlook turned slightly paranoid. "What? Aren't you glad?"

"I'm bored but then again, what choice do I have? I'm stuck in here for at least two more days." Sam closed her eyes in an attempt to ward off the nagging headache that grew stronger every time she thought about her restrictive circumstance.

"Then maybe I shouldn't give you the bad news." He pursed his lips and tapped his nose with a finger pretending to be pondering something.

"Leo," Sam cautioned. "It's not nice to tease, especially when I'm not in the mood for it. You, of all people, should know that."

"Okay, Sam..." He moved behind the armchair in preparation for sister's forthcoming explosion. "Try to remember that you're injured and have to stay calm, really, really calm."

Sam's eyes popped open as she propped herself up on her elbows. "Spill it," she hissed back at him narrowing her gaze in his direction.

"It's mother..." Leo watched as the whites around his sister's eyes grew as big as saucers. "She's at your apartment collecting a few things that you'll need during your recovering time..." He paused long enough to see the terror register on Sam's face, "In Jersey."

"What?" Sam reclined back felling lightheaded. "You have got to be kidding me"

"Nope," He sat down and crossed his legs nonchalantly. "She told me that your surgeon suggested you'd go to a quiet place for a complete recovery. I'm no detective but even I can fill in those blanks."

"Shit, shit, shit! There's no way out of this one, is there?"

"Afraid not, sis," he sneered, pursing his lips into the fakest pout of the century. "Sorry!"

"Great! Just fucking great."

"See Sammy, I told you needed a girlfriend." Leo's mocking reply was met with his sister's penetrating glare. "Ahem, I'm going to grab a soda." He got up from his chair and made a hasty exit.

The sound of a large blast brought the sheen of instant perspiration to Mark's forehead. The lieutenant stood frozen at the ER entrance. After hearing the second bang his hand swiftly sought out his holstered weapon. Mark turned and scanned the street anxiously looking for an assailant of any kind. Relief washed over him as he saw nothing but an old jalopy with a cloud of black smoke coming out of its exhaust pipe.

"Jesus Christ," Mark took several short breaths to calm his racing heart. "It's just a damn backfire."

Mark rubbed his hands on his blue jeans in an attempt to dry his sweating palms.

"It's okay, man. It's been three days already. She's fine now." Mark squared his shoulders trying to shrug off the disturbing memories, but all the same, a shiver still traveled down his spine as images of the paramedics rolling in Sam's almost lifeless body assaulted his mind.

"Get a grip Stevens, for Christ sake. Sam is too stubborn to die." He took a deep breath as if ordering his hands to stop shaking. "Do what you came to do and leave this ghost behind."

Mark took a step inside the ER and scanned the area.

"I can't believe I let her convince me to do this." Not finding the doctor who had played such a vital role in saving Sam's life, Mark rearranged the package he was carrying and headed toward the front desk where he intercepted a tough looking, blonde, curly haired nurse.

"Excuse me I'm looking for a doctor."

"I'm afraid you're going to have to be a little more specific." Danni crossed her arms impatiently.

"I beg your pardon?"

"What kind of doctor do you need?"

"I'm...not sure," Mark groused.

"Where does it hurt?" She gestured in a theatrical manner to different parts of her own body as

she stated the specialties. "Do you need an internist? A gastroenterologist? A Cardiologist maybe? Who knows...a Gynecologist, perhaps?" Danni smiled somewhat seductively.

"What? Oh no, no! You got me wrong." Mark chuckled. "I don't actually need a doctor, I'm fine. Never felt better in my life."

"That's a new one," Danni chuckled knowingly. "But if you need a second opinion, I might be..."

"Okay, let me try again." Mark shook his head and pursed his lips producing an embarrassing smirk "I'm looking for a certain doctor in particular. I don't know her name but she's medium height, green eyes, with shoulder-length blonde hair..."

"Say no more," Danni interrupted him. "There's only one female, blonde doctor around here."

"Really?" Mark's ears perked up.

"Really."

"I'll be damned!"

Although Sam loosely held onto her cards, Leo couldn't help but notice the far off look in his sister's eyes.

"Are you going to hold onto those cards forever?" When she didn't answer, he cleared his throat and tried again. "Sam?" He watched patiently as blue eyes slowly shifted to meet his own.

"Huh?"

Her half-hearted inquiry startled him even more since he was used to his sibling always being one step ahead of him. His concern for her took precedence. "Are you okay, Sam? You look a little...off."

"You mean apart from being shot and having to spend time with mom in Jersey?"

Leo rolled his eyes not buying her attempt to cover her down mood.

"I know you, Sam. That's not the problem."

"Game over!" Sam tossed her cards onto the table.

"Does that mean I get to keep your money?"

"Damn it" Sam slammed her head back against the pillow covering her eyes with her hands.

"What?" Leo shot her a bemused look.

"It's just not right" she continued shaking her head frustrated.

"Of course it is. You quit. The money in the pot is mine fair and square."

"I'm not talking about the damn game."

Leo's confusion reigned supreme. "Then what the hell are you talking about, Sam?"

"Life, Leo. I'm talking about life."

"Call me thick headed and stupid, but I don't understand."

"I've been stuck in this bed for three days. I've had nothing but time to think about my life"

Leo smirked. "And this is where you tell me that you've had some kind of epiphany or something?"

"No." Sam blurted out then quickly changed her mind. "Yes." Seeing the puzzled look on her brother's face, she meekly rescinded, "Maybe."

"Huh?"

"I don't know, sometimes I feel like my life is...empty."

"Empty?" His brows furrowed when she nodded sheepishly. "I don't know it seems like you have a pretty good life to me"

"Do I?" Sam sounded unconvinced.

"Hell yeah!" He jumped up and used his fingers to count the examples. "You have an exciting job, a good salary, a nice place, and your sex life, I don't even want to go there 'cause it just saddens me that my baby sister gets more women than I do."

"No, I don't," she blushed before rhetorically chuckling at his antics.

"You're right, you don't." He sat on the bed next to her. "But you sure get laid more often than I do."

"That's it." She stated as if he'd just hit a sore point. "I get laid."

"What's wrong with getting laid?" Leo tried to make sense of the conversation.

"Nothing, it's just that..." she sighed running both hands through her hair, "I can't remember the last time I had more than a one night stand."

"I thought that was your system. One night stand, no strings attached, low maintaining dating."

"Yeah, but..."

"But what?" He eyed her cautiously. "Sam, you're scaring me. Did you fall for someone?"

"No. I don't think I'll ever be able to fall for someone again." She declared looking away from his stare. "I'm not meant to love."

"Bullshit. You just had a bad experience, got your heart broken."

"You call what happened to me a 'bad experience'?" Her tone was overdramatic.

Leo stood up shaking his head. "Sam, you've been through a lot and it's not easy to heal, but you can't simply hide from love. How long do you think this wall you've built around yourself will hold up? Call me a romantic but, it's unavoidable, when you meet the right person, you'll fall madly in love. Like it or not."

"You have high hopes, don't you?"

"Of course I do. I believe love is the most powerful force in the universe, and I know that a wonderful person like you deserves to find it, the real deal." he smiled sweetly before bending forward to place a brotherly kiss on her head. "I love you, sis"

"Oh, come on. Don't go sissy on me." Sam stared into his eyes for the longest moment. Feeling touched by his words she voiced her own sentiments in return. "I love you too, bro."

Mark walked into the doctor's lounge and scanned the room. Finally spying what he'd been looking for, he ventured closer.

"Excuse me, Dr. Thomas?"

"Yes?" Ann turned to acknowledge the man addressing her.

"I don't know if you remember me..."

"You look familiar, but I'm getting a lot of that lately." She offered honestly.

"Mark Stevens," he said, edging a little closer. "Lieutenant Mark Stevens. I came here with my friend three days ago. The detective who got shot in the back"

"Oh, of course, I remember you now." Ann nodded. "What can I do for you lieutenant?"

"Nothing really, I actually came by to say thank you for saving my friend."

"You don't have to thank me. I was doing my job," Ann replied humbly.

"Yeah, I know, but I have a hidden agenda," he said cryptically noting the suspicious look on Ann's face. "I uh...I was assigned to give you this." He handed her a basket filled to overflowing.

"What's this?" Ann curiously surveyed the basket full of muffins and enough other delectable treats to keep her ER staff energized for another shift.

"It's from Sam's mom. She asked me to see that you received it and to say..."

Mark fumbled in his pocket for a few seconds before producing a scrap of paper. "I wanted to get her words right," he chuckled nervously then began to read from the paper in his hand. "Thank you for saving my little devil."

"This is very kind but I'm afraid I can't take it...hospital policy."

"Oh no, please don't make me take it back. It can be very...unhealthy." Mark faked a panic expression eliciting giggles from the doctor.

"Okay, I'll accept it on behalf of my hard working ER staff." She said taking the basket and placing it on the table. "How is the detective doing?" Ann tried to sound casual.

"Sam? Fine. She's great actually."

"Already?"

"Sam's always been a fast healer."

"That's nice to hear."

Left with nothing more to say Mark studied the doctor's blonde hair and beautiful smile. The woman standing before him definitely fit the profile of Sam's Angel, but he wouldn't dare to hope. That would be too easy. He snapped out of his musing to see an awkward grin on Ann's face and matched it with one of his own. "Anyway, I should let you get back to work, doc."

"Right."

Mark turned to leave but spun back quickly if only to relive his nagging need to fish for confirmation.

"You know what, I'm pretty sure Sam would like to thank you in person. So if you have some time, please come by she'll appreciate that."

"As a matter of fact I've already stopped by to see her," Ann confessed feeling unexplainably shy.

"You did?" Mark tried to keep his emotions in check knowing that a part of him wanted Ann to be Doctor Angel, while the other part wanted it to be just a dream.

"Yeah, but I don't think she remembers. She was still under the effects of the anesthesia."

Mark looked up with renewed interest.

"She kept talking about angels and stuff."

"Angels? Really?" Mark felt a burning sensation in the pit of his stomach. As he roiled with his inner thoughts of what to do, the sound of Ann's pager sliced through the air bringing them both into new territory.

"Sorry, I have to go. Thanks again for the gift." Ann held up the basket, before briskly walking down the hall toward the trauma bay doors.

Mark waved mutely as he tried to figure what to do with this new found information. Long after Dr. Thomas was gone from his view he uttered a single phrase. "Un-fucking-believable."

Continued...

**Warrior Angel's Scrolls
Index Page**

**~ Badges and Needles ~
by Warrior Angel**

Hey guys,

Thanks for the feedback! Keep doing it!

For disclaimers see Part 1

Part 6

New Yorkers go crazy when the Knick's play at home. Words can't describe the frenzy of enthusiastic fans waving pennants and banners as they waited to get into Madison Square Garden. Their excitement was infectious and soon Ann found herself chiming in with the chant.

"We love the Knicks!" It only took a few more times for Danni to follow along with her. Each

time she said Knicks, she plucked at the waistband of her knickerbockers styled pants.

"I can't believe you're wearing your great-grandfather's clothes," Ann snickered.

"These pants are my juju. When it comes to the Knicks, I'm very superstitious." Danni shot back defensively.

"And I see that superstition goes all the way back to your ancestors." Ann teased.

"You're just jealous that you don't have a pair."

"Yeah, right. Let's just hope there aren't any fashion police in attendance tonight."

"You're in a good mood today, my friend. I'm glad you decided to come." Danni stopped a vendor and bought beer for them. "Hey, weren't you planning to spend the weekend with dull boy?"

Ann cleared the turnstile and headed toward the seating area. "Yeah, I changed my mind."

"Why? What did he have planned?" Danni pressed curiously trying to keep up with Ann's determined stride.

"Ballet." Ann answered hesitantly, bracing herself for the teasing to come.

"Ballet?" Danni released a throaty laugh. "Oh my god, he is such a nerd."

"Danni, you promised." Ann cautioned as they moved to their seats.

"Right, no trashing Joe..." Danni smirked hiding her lips behind the cup as she sipped her beer. "Tonight"

Ann shook her head at her incorrigible friend. "Why do you hate him so much?"

"I don't hate him." Danni's head snapped indignantly "I just don't think he's the right person for you."

"Based on what?"

"Based on the fact that you two don't match."

Ann looked at her friend questioningly.

"Let's see if I can make myself clear." Danni scratched her head searching for the right words. "I have this feeling that Joe is looking for some sort of a trophy wife. Someone he can show off at company parties, a woman that stays home and takes care of his children." She looked at Ann. "Beautiful children I might add." Catching the glint of a twinkle coming to Ann's eyes, she

continued on. "Face it Ann, he's the kind of man who goes to a Ballet presentation on a Knicks game night."

"He's sophisticated," Ann rebuked.

"Boring!" Danni rolled her eyes and sighed exasperatedly. "So...if that's the life style you want, why are you here with me instead of there with him?"

Ann opened her mouth to speak but nothing came out.

"Because you wanted to have fun, that's why. Joe is not gonna make you happy. You don't have any friends in common and he doesn't like the same things you do. Come on Ann, open your eyes and find someone that stirs your emotions." Danni put her arm around Ann's shoulders and spoke with a teasing grin. "You need to find someone who wouldn't miss a Knicks' game without a very good reason."

Wide-eyed and innocently Ann blinked. "And who would that be? Someone like you perhaps?"

"Could be but you'll never know if you don't start looking around you." Danni released her friend and slowly surveyed the crowd of spectators and fans filling the sports venue before taking her seat. "It could very well be someone with a ticket for the game tonight." Danni plopped down into her seat and smirked. "At least none of them will be wearing a tutu."

Startled at the thought, Ann was left standing in the dark as all eyes turned toward the spotlighted court and the arrival of their beloved Knick's.

For the average basketball fan, there's nothing wrong about watching a game on TV. For avid fans like Sam and Leo however, it's another story.

"Come on, Sis. You know you can't get that same thrill just by sitting in front of a TV set. The whole atmosphere of the Garden just isn't there. Here you can feel the anticipation and the sweat in the air. Especially from the guy next to me who hasn't had a bath recently," Leo glanced to his side making a disgusting face. "Listen to the fans, Sam. They can't wait for the second half to start." He held his phone up and slowly turned around.

"KNICKS! KNICKS!" Small areas of the Garden broke out in a murmured chant that steadily rose to a fervent cry. "KNICKS!"

He brought the phone back to his ear. "Now that's what gets you pumped to the maximum."

"Come on Leo, you know I'd never miss a Knicks game without a good reason. Now, agree with me that getting shot definitely qualifies as a good reason. "

"Nice move sis, you know I can't trump the getting shot card. Either way, I still don't like being here without you."

"It's ok, bro, mom has a big TV and the sound is amazing."

"It isn't the same as being here. There's this energy that you simply don't get by watching it on TV. Even the beer tastes better here. Not to mention that you're missing out on all the sights off the court."

"True. How's the audience?"

"You know," Leo tried to sound nonchalant as he winked at a woman with a svelte waist and a sultry smile. "The usual"

"You mean lots of hot chicks wearing tight, skimpy tank tops?"

"Exactly! And by the looks of it," he scanned over the crowd. "I think I can honestly say my neck will be sore by the end of the game." At the sound of his sister's laughter, he joined in.

"Wait, I thought you were using my ticket to take a date?"

Leo shrugged as he turned and juggled his cell phone to his other ear. "Yeah, so?" He waved to a cute brunette sitting on the fifth row. "I can't touch but it doesn't mean that I can't look."

"Sounds fair to me."

"Hey, I gotta go. The second half is about to start." His eyes followed the players returning to the court.

"Me too! The halftime recap is just signing off."

"Take care, sis." He terminated his call and blindly spun around. Before Leo could stop, he slammed into another fan, sending a cupful of beer flying.

"Jesus, I'm sorry!" Leo made a hasty attempt at drying the woman's shirt with his hands.

"Hey, watch it there." Ann swatted his hand away from her chest.

"I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to. I was talking to my sister and..."

"Like I really believe that," Ann tried to distance herself but couldn't.

"Look, I didn't mean to..." Leo shifted his gaze upward to acknowledge the blonde in front of him. "Damn!" he grinned, "but I'm not that sorry."

Ann shot her flirting assailant an annoyed look until they made eye contact. There, staring back at her were the similar pair of familiar blue eyes that had been haunting her. Her anger suddenly melted as she stared mindlessly at them.

"Is everything alright?" Danni glanced toward her companion.

"I don't know. I think I broke her." Leo joked referring to the nearly catatonic woman opposite him.

"Ann, are you ok?" Danni touched her friend's shoulder.

Somewhat dazed, Ann finally came around. "What? Yeah, I'm fine." She smiled slightly embarrassed. "Sorry, I spaced out there." She shook her head trying to regain some of her dignity back. "What did you say?"

"Can I replace your beer?" Leo's gaze shifted between the two women.

"No. It's ok," Ann declined.

"Are you sure?" Leo asked skeptically.

Ann quickly averted her gaze to Danni. "Yeah, I'm fine."

"Alright then," Leo lifted an intrigued eyebrow as he caught Danni checking out his butt. "Once again, I'm sorry." He proceeded to turn and then vanished into the crowd.

"Do you know him?" Danni asked watching the retreating man.

"You mean other than by a little gentle petting, no. Although..." Ann paused. "I'm pretty sure I've seen those eyes before."

"Gee, why didn't you introduce me?"

Ann snapped out of her daze. "I don't know him. But he does remind me of someone." She looked into the crowd where she'd last seen the stranger disappear.

"I think he was kind of cute." Danni giggled. "He has a nice tooshie."

"Really? I didn't notice."

"I sure did," Danni declared. "But again, I bet you didn't even notice that you're without a beer in your hand." She waved at a passing vendor and held up a five dollar bill. "I got this round. You're paying for the next."

Ann pulled herself out from under the nagging feeling that had descended on her. It was the same feeling that had been accelerating her heartbeat ever since those blue eyes had first appeared. "Yeah, what's a Knick's game without a beer?"

"Ann, wake up" Danni snapped her fingers trying to get her friend's attention without disturbing the rest of the after game crowd that packed their local pizzeria.

"Oh! Sorry." Ann smiled self-consciously.

"What's happening to you?" Danni asked concernedly.

Ann took a bite of her pizza and spoke around a mouthful. "What do you mean?"

"What do you mean what I mean?" Danni widened her eyes dramatically. "You have been spacing out since that guy crashed into you. By the way you've been acting I think you might have a concussion."

"I have not."

"Oh, really? What was the final score to the game?"

Ann smiled sheepishly as Danni rolled her eyes. "Uh...the Knicks won."

"Ann, please, I practically spent the entire second half just elbowing you so you could pay attention to what was happening on the court." Danni narrowed her eyes suspiciously. "What's the matter, Doc got a crush on cute tooshie boy?"

"What? No, it's not that." Ann looked around the restaurant as if searching for a subject changing. When she found none, she decided to cut to the chase. "The problem is that...I've been haunted."

"Haunted? Like in 'Boo! I'm scared' haunted?"

Ann thought for a moment then slowly nodded.

Danni leaned forward and used her index finger and thumb to make a small gesture. "Ann, I'm this close to slapping you on the forehead, so I suggest you start making some sense."

Ann covered her face with both hands and took in a deep breath. Once she'd exhaled, she lowered her hands and stared blankly at the half eaten pizza on her plate. "I've been having this dream for a week now."

"What dream?" Danni reclined back on her seat and took a bite of her pizza.

"I always dream that I'm sitting on the top of a small hill. I'm watching this beautiful sunset when all of a sudden, this pair of blue eyes gradually appears in the clouds. They're looking straight through me and right into my soul. Then as the sun finally sets, the eyes fade away."

"Granted, it is a little spooky, but not enough to really scare me." Danni studied her friend more closely. "So, why is it scaring you?"

Ann stared off into space, her voice somewhat detached. "I wake up feeling...abandoned."

"That's crazy. You don't even know who those eyes belong to..." Danni's voiced took on a skeptical note, "or do you?"

"That's the weird part." Ann smiled sheepishly.

"Why?" Danni's brows rose ever so slightly.

"The guy from the game..."

"The one that gave you the beer shower just to get all touchy-feely?"

Ann smirked. "Yeah. His eyes were almost the same..."

"Almost?"

"Yeah, almost but not the same. Something was missing."

"It's a dream, Ann. Did you expect a perfect match?"

Ann simply shrugged. "Maybe. I don't know." She looked away doubting her own abilities to make any sense of the details.

Sensing her friend's inner debate, Danni laid her hand on Ann's arm. "You know what I think? I think you want to fall in love and these eyes that are haunting you just might be it. I say you go for it."

"Danni!"

Ann's beleaguered eyes spoke more than she could ever say and Danni hastened into her explanation. "No I'm serious. I think you want to find someone that sweeps you off your feet just by looking into your eyes." Danni stared point blank into Ann's eyes, then hurriedly crossed her own sending a ripple of gentle laughter washing over them both.

"You're impossible" Ann chuckled at her friend's antics. "Are you sure you're not the one who wants that?"

"Sure I do." Danni relaxed back into her chair sipping her beer. "And if the eyes come with a nice butt, I'd be a very happy woman."

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Warrior Angel's Scrolls
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~ **Badges and Needles** ~
by Warrior Angel

Hey guys,

Thanks for the feedback! Keep doing it!

For disclaimers see Part 1

Part 7

Mark stood quietly at the entrance to his garage watching the raw determination on Sam's face as she completed yet another set of reps. The weights in her hand weren't nearly as heavy as the last time she'd used his private gym. With no standing in line or worrying over whose sweat was smeared all over the bench, this place was Mark's sanctuary and since Sam was like family to him, she was entitled the right to share his home privileges.

Inwardly, Mark chuckled thinking of how many times in the last year alone Sam had crashed on his sofa after a long drawn out case only to start up again as soon as the first pot of coffee was made the next morning. Sam was family all right, in more ways than one.

Watching the sweat glistening over Sam's straining muscles wasn't doing his libido any more good than standing there would do to help Sam recover. The clang of iron weights striking the concrete rattle through his brain as Sam hung her head between her knees while rivulets of sweat dripped from her chin.

"You shouldn't push yourself too hard," Mark advised.

"I gotta get this shoulder back into shape." Sam stretched her left arm behind her head and grimaced at the pain caused by the movement. "It still hurts."

"That's normal, Sam. It's only been five weeks since the shooting." Mark picked up a towel and held it out to her. "Some people take months to recover completely."

"I'm not some people, Mark." Sam snapped grabbing the towel. "And I can't take months to recover."

"When is your next doctor's appointment?"

"Tomorrow morning." She wiped her face then tossed the towel over the bench. "I've got to be cleared to work or I'll lose my mind."

"You've always been a lousy patient."

She glared at him as she stood up. "I know. I'm starting to become a real bitch."

"Tell me about it!" Mark muttered under his breath. Suddenly a nagging idea popped in his mind "So, are you going back to the hospital for your appointment?"

"Nope, the clinic" She turned around and prepared the machine for her next set of weight lifting.

Transfixed and pensive, Mark decided to test the water. "Hey Sam, I haven't heard you mentioning anything about that Angel Doctor of yours recently. Have you given up on her?"

"Doctor Angel?" Sam winced as she continued her struggle against the strained muscles on her left shoulder. "No, I figured she was just a dream."

"Only a dream?" Mark queried rather amused.

"Yeah, a drug induced psychosis of some kind. Why?"

"Oh, I don't know." He kept his voice just above a whisper. "I was just thinking, what if she's real?"

"Like that could happen," Sam snorted. When no reply came, she lifted a suspicious eyebrow in Mark's direction. "What do you know?"

"Just speculating, besides you did say that you saw someone."

"Oh, I don't doubt that," Sam shook her head dismissively as she continued to adjust the weights in her hand. "But it was probably someone, anyone checking on me."

"So you mean the whole sweet voice, beautiful smile thing..."

"It was just the anesthesia talking." Sam's face was unreadable. She kept her tough-girl-mask on as she focused on the exercise. "Why all this questioning?"

Her refusing to make eye contact intrigued Mark. "Nothing, just chatting," He shrugged nonchalantly letting the matter drop.

"Well, how about less chatting and a little more help where my concentration's concerned?" Sam put the hand weight down and motioned toward the bench where the long bar was rested, loaded with fifty pounds of weight. "Care to spot me?"

Mark took in Sam's overall appearance. It was the most drained he'd ever seen her...well, other

than when she was laying with her blood pooling all around her. Right then and there he knew it was time to put an end to her misery if only for a short while.

"Sure, why not?" As he turned to position himself at the head of the bench, Mark noted the time displayed on the clock opposite him. "Hey, look how late it is. You'd better go get a shower. You know how Allison hates stinky people around the dinner table."

Sam snorted. "Then how come she's still married to you?"

"Cause I smell perfectly good in all the right places, baby!" Mark winked teasingly with his 'gotcha' sneer plastered on his face.

"I'll tell you Sam, it was beyond hysterical seeing Mark chasing that damn white mouse around the house." Allison Stevens was laughing so hard that tears were threatening to spill from her eyes. Even though Mark's wife had been torturing her husband by sharing with Sam really embarrassing household stories, the mood at the dinner table couldn't be more relaxing. "Needless to say he didn't catch the little assailant and to make things worse, when he finally gave up, the garage looked like a tornado had swept through it."

"Gee, lieutenant, you were outsmarted by a little mouse...tsk tsk." Sam teased mercilessly watching him blush.

"But the best part is that the next day the neighbor's cat showed up at our front door that same little white rodent between his teeth."

"Wow, Mark the cat beat you? I think you're getting old partner."

"If I'm getting old, so are you smartie pants." He retorted in a childlike manner then did a quick 180 degree turn into adulthood again. "Besides catching mice is a cat's job anyway. They're supposed to be good at that." Mark tried to muster some dignity as he glared at his wife. "I, on the other hand, am more astute to catching perpetrators of the criminal type. And by the way Miss Funny Face, the next time a mouse shows up, you're gonna be the one doing the chasing."

"Don't worry, honey," Allison smiled seductively, "I've already got the cat's number on speed dial."

Sam's heartfelt laugh cautioned Mark of his need to change the subject or he wouldn't see the end of this teasing. Searching for a quick diversion, his gaze fell on his two 'not-so-innocent' looking kids.

"Okay, enough about me. What are you two up to?"

"Nothing!"

The answer hurriedly spat off in unison served only to increase Mark's suspiciousness.

"You don't fool me. Those giggles mean trouble, so spill it."

The two siblings shared a conspiring look before they turned their gaze at Sam.

"Do you have a girlfriend, Sam?" Brian asked boldly.

"Excuse me?" His parents' heads jerked as they imitated the near unison response of their children, startling the boy.

Sam laughed at the sight. "It's okay. Put your guns down." She gestured for the two adults to take it easy then turned toward the stunned eight-year-old boy. "No Brian, I don't have a girlfriend."

Allison cleared her throat. "May I ask why the sudden interest in Sam's love life?"

Feeling the heat of his mother's stern gaze Brian looked at his younger sister Becky who seemed rather eager to provide relief.

"Because Sam is all alone and she needs a girlfriend."

"Yeah!" Brian regained his courage and completed his sister's explanation. "We think that Sam should find someone like Aunt Jessie or maybe Ms. Johnson."

"Your math teacher?" Allison's brows shot up in honest surprise when a pair of blonde heads nodded eagerly.

"Ms. Johnson is very sad and alone too." Becky offered simply.

"And how would a six year old know that?" Mark joined in curious to see where this was heading.

"Because when adults are in love, they act all mooshy..."

"Like you and mom do sometimes" Brian finished his sister's sentence with his eyes darting quickly back and forth between his parents.

"Yeah, and when they are dating, they get all dressed up, but Ms. Johnson just wears jeans," Becky nodded toward the center of their conversation, "Like Sam does."

"So you two decided to play matchmakers." Mark's conclusion was met with enthusiastic nods. "Great! More Yentes in my life," he muttered winking at his wife.

"Hush, now. If it wasn't for my Aunt Berta, we would have never met," Allison defended the matchmaker's roll in her life.

"Yeah, that and a dead body lying on the sidewalk outside her apartment building," Mark

gripped teasingly.

"Well, you did look dashing in your blue uniform," Allison mused, "interviewing that crowd of bystanders. However, I didn't see you taking everyone else's telephone numbers."

The lazy emergence of a smile relayed Mark's inner most feeling about his marriage. "It was strictly a gut feeling, my dear."

Although totally enjoying the family banter, Sam's curiosity was peaked. "Why did you think of me, Becky?"

Becky shrugged. "Cause she's beautiful and you're beautiful too."

"I'm beautiful?" Sam was touched by the compliment.

"Yeah, dad says you're hot." Brian declared innocently then yelped when his father cuffed his head. "Hey, what did you do that for?"

"Sorry, I thought I saw a bug in there." Mark lied shamelessly.

"You think I'm hot?" Sam sneered at her partner.

"He does." The disjointed chorus of voices caused another round of giggles.

"I never used the word 'hot'," Mark shot defensively. "I might have said that you're not so bad on the eyes."

"Honey, you did say 'hot' but as I love you I'm gonna let you off the hook." Allison started collecting the dishes. "Come my little cupids, help mom clear the table and earn your sweet reward."

"Can I have vanilla ice cream?"

"You don't like vanilla." Brian objected.

Becky collected her brother's plate and her own. "I do to."

"You do not. You like strawberry and chocolate." He stated, getting up from his chair and reaching for Sam's place setting. "Sam likes vanilla."

"She likes strawberry as well." Becky retorted louder.

"Hey! Why don't we let Sam choose her own ice cream flavor?" Allison suggested putting an end to the argument.

"Here, let me help." Sam attempted to get up from her chair only to be stopped by the gentle

touch of Allison's hand on her shoulder as she round the table.

"Nonsense," Allison leaned toward Sam's ear and began the first inklings of a conspiracy of her own. "You stay and make him squirm a little more."

Sam grinned as Mark playfully landed a love tap his wife's butt.

"Hey! Keep that up and you won't get any desert," Allison warned faking an angry look.

"As long as I get some sweetness later tonight," Mark chuckled at Allison's teasing snort as she ushered her children into the kitchen.

"You have a wonderful family, Mark." Sam played with her napkin. "Don't waste it."

"I don't plan to." Mark turned his gaze back to his partner and proceeded to study her somewhat melancholic face. "Are you okay, Sam?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. I'm not as lonely and sad as your junior detectives think I am, but I must admit that I've been feeling...alone ever since the shooting."

"You're not alone. I'm here..." he motioned toward the kitchen indicating the rest of his family. "We're here for you."

"I know. But sometimes I wish I had a home of my own to go back to every night." She admitted quickly before putting on a stoic mask. "Then I walk into the apartment, take an aspirin or two and the pain goes away."

"I...I didn't know you felt that way."

"I didn't. At least I haven't since...you-know-who."

"Well, 'you-know-who' belongs to your past, and if you ask me, that's where you should keep her." Mark excused himself from the table and stood up. "Stay here. I'll be right back." He walked into his office and retrieved a file from the top drawer at his desk. "As you know, God works in mysterious ways, and maybe there's something worthwhile in your very near future." He emerged back into the dining room and handed Sam the file.

"What is this?" She took the offered folder eyeing Mark suspiciously.

"Open it." He sat back and waited, more relaxed than he thought he would be.

Sam read the first line then quickly turned to Mark. "Who the hell is Ann Thomas?"

"Keep going." Mark smirked. "Out loud if you'd like."

Sam began. "Ann Lauren Thomas, MD. Age thirty-six, born in Los Angeles, California." Sam

closed the folder, her eyes questioning her partner before the words were out of her mouth.
"Mark, why am I reading this?"

"Well, I don't know if she's the sure thing, but she's a very close call."

"Close call to what?" Sam's gaze pinned him. "Is this some case you're working on without me?"

"Not really. You asked me to look into your Angel. I mean Dr. Angel." He sat forward engaging Sam mentally. "And I'd bet good money that Dr. Thomas is the woman you've been dreaming of."

"How did you...how did you come up with this?"

"I don't know, maybe I discovered some hidden detective instincts inside of me. In fact, I'm thinking of becoming a police officer. Hey, wait a minute," his face lit up before settling into a self-satisfying smirk. "I am a police officer." Mark leaned back in his chair as confident as ever. "She's the ER doctor who saved your life."

Sam's eyes drifted to the file lying in her hands. "Why are you giving me this?"

"Because I think you need it now more than ever, Sam. Look, this woman has already held your heart, who knows, maybe she's the one who's gonna hold it forever." Mark stood up and placed a consoling hand on her shoulder. "But you'll never know if you don't give yourself a chance."

He got up and started towards the kitchen only to stop when an after thought struck him. "By the way," Mark turned to face her, "There's a picture of her in there as a small token of my friendship." He winked, then left his friend staring mutely at the file, obviously too scared to open it but too afraid not to if Ann was truly the mystery woman of her dreams.

Two o'clock in the morning and yet sleep was nowhere near the wide-eyed woman lying on the couch, her gaze fixed blankly as she stared at the non-descriptive ceiling over her head. After tossing and turning for hours, Sam finally gave up and decided to confront the cause of her insomnia. She turned to her side and reached for the file Mark had given her. She opened it for what seemed to be the thousandth time that night and retrieved the picture of Ann Thomas.

"So, you do have a face?" The image was of Ann standing outside the hospital, apparently totally unaware of the snapshot being taken. Sam touched the picture with the tip of her finger. "I can't believe you're real."

Sam closed her eyes and replayed the voice in her head that had been echoing in her dreams.

"Oh yes, it's a perfect match."

What are you going to do now? Sam's inner voice had been nagging her since she read the file for the first time.

She chose to ignore it and focused on the picture. "Do you remember me?"

What if she does?

"There's a boyfriend." Sam's mind fought against her heart's daring hopes. She quickly searched for his name on the page making the fact even more of a reality. "There it is, Joseph Green."

So what? It never stopped you before. Remember Jessica? Sandra? Natalie? They all had husbands too.

"They meant nothing to me. I just borrowed them from their husbands for a night...or two." She fought with her conscious before turning her attention back to the photograph in her hand. "But you're so beautiful, Ann Thomas. More beautiful than I ever imagined and if you really are my Dr. Angel..." For the briefest of moments, Sam speculated the possibilities.

What are you going to do about it?

As quickly as a door could be slammed shut, her mind was an empty blank. All the images that had previously been toyed with were miraculously locked away along with any heart she'd had left in it's walled off space.

"Would you shut up?" She cut off her internal monologue abruptly. Even though Sam's detective instincts were telling her that Ann could lead her to a deepest love, she knew all too well that love and heartaches walked hand in hand.

"Doctor Angel is nothing but an illusion. She's just a dream and that's how she's going to remain."

You're a coward, Samantha. You may not be afraid of getting shot, but you're a wimp when it comes to the matters of the heart.

"Shut-the-fuck-up!" She snapped, rearranging the throw pillows beneath her head in the hope that sleep would finally claim her.

Continued...

~ Badges and Needles ~

by Warrior Angel

Hey guys,

Thanks for the feedback! Keep doing it!

For disclaimers see Part 1

Part 8

Physically exhausted from another hectic day, Ann exited Radiology and grabbed a bottle of water off the hospitality cart as she passed through the waiting area. She plucked a small bottle of Tylenol out of her lab coat pocket, and popped two pills into her mouth.

"I feel like my head is going to explode this very minute." Ann washed the pills down with a large gulp of water.

She stuffed the bottle back in her pocket as she rounded a blind corner nearly crashing into a heavy-set African American man dressed in a cheap suit. Judging by his graying goatee, Ann figured the man was in his late forties. Immediately, she recognized him as her most recent pain in the ass from the ER.

"Doctor Thomas," He tried to intercept Ann.

"Not again, Sergeant. Honestly, I don't have time for another spat." She waved him off with an impatient hand.

The man flexed his fist in frustration and marched after Ann. "Doctor, I'm only trying to do my job. Why won't you let me talk to him? There are no marks on the boy. He's not bleeding. I can only assume that he's not injured."

"Not physically but he's showing signs of post-traumatic stress." Ann proceeded over to the elevator and jabbed the down button a few more times than she needed to. "You're going to have to wait until the pediatric psychiatrist is finished with him. I can assume you want what's only good for the boy."

"What's good for him isn't what's good for..." the man paused for only a few seconds before contouring with his next question. "How long is that going to take?"

"Look, this little boy just saw a woman being raped and badly beaten..."

"He said that?" the man jumped in eagerly. "Are those his words?"

"I didn't say that." Ann retorted harshly eyeing him suspiciously. "Give the boy sometime,

alright." She entered the elevator and hammered on the button.

"Okay, fine. But I need to speak with him...and the sooner the better." The man raised his voice as the elevator doors closed.

"Fuck you." Ann cursed intently at the man that had been left on the floor above.

"Bad day?"

Inwardly Ann sighed realizing that she'd been caught in an unprofessional display of emotions. She turned to see Dr. O'Neil standing behind her.

"Sorry Peter, I didn't see you there or I would have kept my foul mouth and mood to myself. I apologize."

"It's ok. Who was that anyway?" Peter nodded at the elevator's door.

"Just some annoying cop. Sergeant something or other,"

"He must be new, they're always over zealous. I'd turn him in if I were you. Did you happen to see his badge number?"

Ann paused replaying the unpleasant scene over in her head. "I can't say that I did."

"Maybe next time," Peter offered as he took his boss's tired features into consideration. "You look like you could use a break, Ann. Why don't you go crash in the doctor's lounge?"

"I wish I could. I promised Taylor I'd give him a hand in the clinic today." She looked at her watch as the elevator glided to a stop. "And right now I'm running incredibly late."

The doors opened to reveal a sea of uniformed policemen filling the hallway.

"Why is this place so packed with police today?"

"They are always around here. I think it is part of the master plan for any urban hospital," Ann declared checking her watch again. "Listen, can you handle the ER for a few hours? I really need to head to the clinic."

"Sure, go ahead."

"Thanks, Pete." Before the words were out of her mouth, Ann was rushing down to the exit door.

Mark waited with bated breath as he stood watching the front doors of the building where Sam had asked him to meet her. He checked his watch for the third time in the past fifteen minutes

before running a nervous hand through his brown hair. Slowly the seconds ticked by until the doors opened to reveal a grinning Sam.

"So, it is good news then. Am I correct?"

"Absolutely!" Sam's response was accompanied by a vigorous positive head shake. "The doctor cleared me. I can go back to work tomorrow."

"That's great Sam. You have no idea how happy I am."

"Not as happy as I am, pal." Her grin widened.

"I mean it. I wouldn't be able to stall Captain Bennett for much long. He wanted to hook me up with another partner." Mark exhaled a sigh of relief. "Not to mention that you really freaked me out. You know, you have no idea how scary it was to see you lying in that pool of blood. I thought I'd lose you." He confessed fighting to keep his inner demons at bay.

"Well, I'm not going anywhere, partner." Sam patted his back before pulling him closer in a one arm hug. "You're stuck with me for a long, long time."

"Good." Mark nodded. He was glad to see his friend in a better mood. "How about having a beer to celebrate?"

"Not yet. I'm still on meds." Sam informed as she searched her pockets. "In fact, the doctor prescribed something new for the pain..." Her hands kept roaming the pockets in her pants and jacket until they came to an abrupt halt. "Shit, I forgot the prescription." She declared retracing her steps into the building. "Stay there. I'll be right back."

In a flash Sam disappeared inside the clinic. Seeing his partner's renewed vigor and enthusiasm made Mark chuckle. His revelry, however, was short lived after hearing a familiar name called out a little louder than it should have been.

"Dr. Thomas?"

Mark turned to see a large, dark-skinned man approaching the familiar looking doctor as she made her way across the plaza. Something about the man's demeanor raised Mark's hackles. The burly man had an air of hostility pouring out of him. A sharper appreciation of his body language quickly turned him into a suspect when Mark saw the guy's hand fumbling for something in his waistband. By the volume of the bulge coming from under the man's jacket, Mark knew he had a gun. Immediately, the lieutenant started to react but slowed considerably once his peripheral vision caught Sam standing attentively only a few feet away from the obvious display.

"If you don't mind, I'm really late for a meeting." Ann growled, turning away.

"Doctor, nobody in that damn ER wants to tell me where the boy is." The man strode right up to Ann and mustered every inch of his height in an effort to intimidate the woman as he stepped in

front of her. "They said you ordered the boy to be secured."

In direct response, Ann took a step back trying to regain some personal space. "Yes, I did. As I've said before, the child needs to be cleared by the psychiatrist before he speaks to anyone."

"Look doctor, I don't have time to waste waiting for some shrink to give his okay. I want to see that boy NOW." The man tried to impose his authority by leaning in. He was so close that his nose was almost touching Ann's.

Sensing an escalating situation, Mark came forward with a couple of determined strides. "Is there a problem here, Dr. Thomas?"

Ann glanced to her side and the vision of a familiar face approaching was like a breath of fresh air.

"Lieutenant, I'm so glad to see you." Ann made no effort to hide her relief. "I was just explaining to your colleague that he's going to have to wait until he can talk to a witness."

"A colleague, huh?" Mark furrowed his brow questioningly as he appraised the man standing in front of him.

"Yeah, I'm Sergeant Miller." A bead of sweat appeared on the man's forehead as he flashed his badge arrogantly for less than a nanosecond.

"And what division are you from?"

Three pair of eyes turned to meet the owner of the deep voice arising from behind Dr. Thomas. Mark caught Ann's intake of breath as she got her first standing-tall glimpse on his partner. Mark's lips curled into a ghostly smile. The look on Ann's face spoke more than a thousand words and it didn't need a detective to know that the doctor had just been charmed by his friend's intensity.

His gaze left Ann to take in Sam's stern face and defensive posture. Immediately Mark was brought back to the awkward situation at hand. He squared his shoulders and took a defense posture of his own, ready to jump in with both feet in case all hell broke loose.

"And you are?" Miller clenched his jaw obviously annoyed at the woman who had him pinned in a deadly stare.

"This is detective Mathews and I'm lieutenant Stevens from homicides." Mark quickly stepped in knowing that Sam's arched eyebrow meant that she'd like to get a good grip on Miller's neck and kick him around the block.

"I'm Sergeant Miller from Domestic Violence." He alternated his gaze between Sam and Mark.

"Domestic Violence, they have good people there." Sam's facial features softened. "Is Estevez

still on the force?"

Sam's sudden change of tone seemed to set Miller's teeth on the edge. He hesitated for a second before answering. "Yeah, he's still there."

"I really like that big old ox."

"Yeah, that's what we call him, the big ol' fox," Miller agreed a little too easily.

A subtle smile edged Sam's lips upward at the nervous man's reply. "You tell him Sam said hello."

"I'll do that." Miller nodded, and then blew out a hard breath. "Listen doctor, you find me as soon as I can see the boy, okay?"

Ann finally tore her eyes off of Sam when she realized she was being addressed. Caught off guard and mouth agape, Ann took a shaky breath before nodding her agreement.

Miller studied the doctor for a long hard moment then addressed Mark and Sam promptly ending the conversation. "I'll see you around the station house."

"Sure thing," Mark acknowledged the retreating man. He paused long enough for Miller to be out of sight before turning to Sam and uttering the single most important question that was on his mind. "Who the hell is Estevez?"

"You tell me. The only Estevez I know works in a grocery store near my mother's house." Sam gave her partner a shark smile as his eyes widened in acknowledgement.

"Clever, very clever!" Mark clapped his hands and beamed at his partner's simple yet very effective trick.

The emotional surges of the last few minutes had just sent Dr. Thomas through uncharted waters. Ann's head was spinning as she processed all that had just transpired. She took a deep breath struggling to ignore the fact that the woman standing in front of her was the one that had been haunting her dreams.

The small talk going on around her brought Ann out of her semi-catatonic state. She moved forward and stepped up into the space between Mark and Sam.

"Wait a minute, what does this all mean?" Ann alternated her gaze between the two cops.

"It means that Sgt. Miller, if that is his name, is not a cop," Mark explained.

"Or at least he's not who he claims to be," Sam pondered aloud. "Who is this kid he's after?"

Ann lifted her eyes to meet Sam's gaze and suddenly, time stood still.

"I'm sorry," Mark broke the silence. "I forgot to introduce you." He hid a subtle smile as he watched both women averting their stunned gaze in an effort to hide their embarrassment. "Sam, this Dr. Thomas. She's the woman who saved your life. Dr. Thomas, this is Sam. Last time you saw her she was bleeding out all over your table."

"I remember." Ann wrinkled her nose acknowledging the fact. "Glad to see you're okay, detective."

"Thanks to you, doctor. I own you my life."

"You don't own me anything. Besides, your mother has already provided a very fattening 'Thank You' basket."

"Oh yeah," Sam rolled her eyes. "That's my mother alright. Food is her answer for everything." Their eyes locked again but this time Sam managed to keep the conversation going. "So, who is this kid?"

"He arrived earlier to the ER along with a traumatized woman," Ann speech took on a more professional flare. "My assessment could only lead me to suspect that she was assaulted and raped."

"And the kid witnessed the attack?" Sam's mind was functioning at full speed.

"We don't know for sure but the police did say they found him hiding behind a dumpster at the scene."

"Is he hurt?" Mark's concern was evident in his tone.

"No, but he's presenting some symptoms of PTSD."

Mark shot his partner a puzzled gaze.

"Post Traumatic Stress Disorder." Sam clarified.

"Exactly," Ann said somewhat surprised.

Mark's mouth dropped open. "How did you..."

"Internet," Sam declared as a matter of fact.

"Sure, rub it on my face that you have time to surf the web. The only thing my kids let me do is buy the computer and pay the bill for the usage fee." Mark turned his attention back to Ann.

"Anyway, does the woman have an ID?"

"No. She was unconscious upon her arrival and without anything to proclaim her identity. No purse or driver's license, I'm afraid she's known only to us as a Jane Doe."

"And this boy?" Sam studied Ann's face as she waited for an answer.

"He's not speaking either." Ann's eyes flickered between the two officers as she tried to follow their line of thought. "Do you think Sergeant Miller has something to do with the attack?"

"We can't really tell." Mark answered dismissively. "We'd have to see who's in charge of the investigation."

"Can't you two take on the case?" Ann suggested.

"I'm afraid this is not a homicide case," Mark replied prudently.

"Doctor--"

"Call me Ann."

"Ann," a bit of a smile tinged Sam's lips. "Do you think we can see this woman?"

"Sam," Mark cautioned knowing his partner was up to something. "We better not get involved. You know how you are when someone else goes sniffing around one of our cases."

"It's just for curiosity sake, Mark. No strings attached." Sam tried to look as innocent as possible.

"I'll take you to see her." Ann led the duo inside the hospital.

They made their way through the ER halls as Ann led Mark and Sam directly to a trauma room. Without hesitation, Ann reached for the doors just as a doctor stepped out nearly crashing into her.

"Whoa! Sorry." The self absorbed man side stepped the cluster of bodies.

"Ben, what's wrong?" Ann stared into the room as one by one the machines were being disconnected from the motionless patient lying on the gurney.

The resident snapped his gloves off tossing them at the waste basket. "We just lost her."

"Shit!" Ann ran a nervous hand through her hair.

"Well, looks like we got a homicide case after all," Sam smirked as she wiggled her eyebrows knowingly at her partner.

Mark sighed and turned an appreciative gaze in her direction. "Welcome back, Sam."

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~ Badges and Needles ~
by Warrior Angel

Hey guys,

Thanks for the feedback! Keep doing it!

For disclaimers see Part 1

Part 9

Okay, time to get back.

Sam turned off the ignition and gazed up to the second floor of the police station where the homicide division was housed. The sudden take off of a horde of butterflies in her stomach made her grip the steering wheel with both hands.

She closed her eyes and rolled her shoulder in an effort to relax. Instead, it did just the opposite and the muscles in her shoulder cramped. The influx of pain caught her off guard and Sam wondered whether it was still from the shooting or from the anxiety of getting back to her old life. She took a deep breath letting it out slowly while she eyed the building with trepidation.

Sam looked at herself in the rearview mirror and saw something in her eyes that she had never seen before, hesitance. Slowly, she pulled the door open and got out of the car feeling slightly dizzy as she stood up. She walked a few paces toward the police station wondering why her heart was pounding so hard.

"I was shot."

A sudden feeling of vulnerability bruised her haughty ego.

You saved a life. Her inner voice quickly turned it around.

"Bullshit!! They saw me down. I'm no longer their indestructible super-cop."

Everybody has their flaws and you're not a Goddess.

"Exactly!"

Sam made her way across the parking lot and through the front door.

"I'm a mere mortal who could crumple and fall like everybody else."

The realization that she was afraid to fall short of her colleagues' expectations made her feel unsettled, confused, and even a little lightheaded. Sam reached for the elevator button and realized she was shaking. Dumbfounded, Sam stared at her trembling hand.

"Christ, now what?"

Suddenly she felt dizzy. Sam closed her eyes very aware of her breathing. She felt a tightness on her chest as her heart raced and pounded like it was going to explode. Sam took a deep breath realizing she was on the verge of a panic attack. As unrealistic a reaction as it seemed she still couldn't stop the tingling sensation in her hands from traveling all the way down to her feet.

Pull yourself together!

Sam entered the elevator and rubbed her sweat covered palms on her jeans. Her heart was beating so hard that she could hear it. The ding sound coming from the opening elevator doors startled her a little.

"Fuck!"

Sam took a deep calming breath and worked on composing herself as she walked out.

"Let's get this over with."

Sam dug deep for her resolve and pushed forward opening the door to a resonant round of applause.

Sam blushed as she was caught off guard by the greeting. Accustomed to hiding her emotions, it didn't take long for her to recover and accept the homage that was being given her. She bowed flamboyantly and the ovation intensified. Once over her initial shock, Sam couldn't help but laugh as she reveled in the whistles and cheers coming from the group of officers squeezed into the room.

One by one Sam scanned their faces until she came upon Mark looking like the cat that had just eaten the canary. Her right eyebrow arched as she narrowed her gaze in his direction.

You're a dead man, lieutenant.

"Speech, speech, speech!" Mark's grin widened as he started a chant all his own.

Soon everybody in the room joined in. "Speech, speech..."

"Okay, okay," Sam said motioning for the commotion to stop. Slowly she surveyed the room as she thought of what to say. "I have to admit that you've caught me off guard here. I really, don't know what to say." Sam cleared her throat. "I'd like to thank all of you for the support whether it came in the form of visits, cards, and/or gifts."

A rueful smile crossed Sam's lips as she thought of one gift in particular. "I particularly enjoyed the playboy collection. Thank you, Jimmy." Sam singled him out. "I have to admit that there were some exceptionally nice articles that month."

"More like no articles...of clothing," Jimmy denoted a little too eagerly.

A shrill whistle broke the air as a redhead uniformed officer raised his cup and cheered, "I bet you could tell the story just by looking at the pictures..."

"Let's keep it clean," Mark side mouthed, feigning that he'd even said it a second later.

"The voice of authority," someone chuckled.

Sam calmed the group with a raised hand.

"All in all, it's really wonderful to be back." Sam felt her throat tense at the thought of almost having died. She swallowed and forced her mind back to her cynical old self. "Now as I can see, you missed me more than I missed you, because the crime rate has come up during my absence." Sam wiggled her brows teasingly and laughed out loud. "Okay, okay truth to be told, I missed you all very much. Now let's back to work before this city falls into real chaos."

"You heard the woman, people." Mark mustered in a stern sounding voice. "Belly up the donut bar and move your asses back to work." He then raised his cup for a toast. "To Sam..."

"To Sam!" The group repeated in unison as one by one, everybody in the room extended their individual greetings to the prodigal detective as they passed by. The last one to approach her was a self-conscious rookie.

"Hey Jake, how is it going? Got a new haircut?"

"S-Sam I..." he stammered nervously. "I want you to know that..."

"We've already had this talk, haven't we?" Sam did her best to put the young cop at ease as she'd done every time Jake had visited her in the hospital. "You did nothing wrong, on the contrary, you were very brave out there."

"I was stupid," he snapped. "I could have jeopardized the whole operation, not to mention that

you almost died to save me."

Catching his self depreciatively tone, Sam tried to rid him of his guilt once and for all. "I'm alive and the operation was a success. We did it as a team. We all look out for each other." She spoke seriously studying the young man before her. "How old are you Jake?"

"I'll be twenty-three in two weeks."

"Let me give you a piece of advice. Consider it an advanced birthday present." She motioned him closer. When they were only a hair apart, she spoke in a whisper that only he could hear.

"There's nothing wrong in making mistakes, the problem is not learning from them. And most importantly, keep your eyes open and your head down. That way you can make sure you grow old enough to retire and tell your grandchildren how this beautiful woman saved your life just so you could become the best police officer in New York City." Sam tousled his hair and smiled gently. "Keep doing the right things and you'll be a great cop some day. I'm sure of it."

"Thank you, Sam" Jake surprised her with a tight hug. "I only wish I can be as good as you some day."

"Oh please! Don't encourage her." Mark came from behind and grabbed the rookie by the neck. "Lesson number one kid: don't ever, ever tell Samantha Mathews how good she is or she'll be unbearable to live with."

Sam threw back her head and released a throaty laugh. "Nobody needs to tell me the obvious, Mark."

"See what you've done?" Mark glared at Jake. "Now I've got to live with her cocky self the rest of the day."

The look of admiration in Jake's eyes gave away how much he idolized the woman who had saved his life.

"Mathews, Stevens..." the gruff voice of their captain split the air.

The two cops turned to see their captain standing by the door to his office.

"Alright boys, party's over." Sam called out then directed her gaze to Jake before patting his shoulder. "You take care, kid."

"Thanks, Sam."

Captain Troy Bennett was a hard, ambitious, and a very objective man who prized talent and competence. He played politics well otherwise he wouldn't be in the position he was. There was one thing that he was a real stickler for and that was following his protocols. The most important

of which was keeping him abreast of every case under his supervision lest he be caught off guard by any impromptu press coverage. His years of experience provided enough wisdom for him to know when a case had potential to escalate from 'just an ordinary' homicide to a public pressure case. And in his eyes, a woman beaten to death in front of a little boy sure had potential to turn into something big. That's why the reasonably large and very masculine gray haired man sat behind his desk, rolled up his sleeves and cut right to the chase.

"What do we know about the Jane Doe from the hospital that you two just happened to be there for?" He narrowed his eyes knowing that Mark and Sam had a magnetic attraction for hard cases.

Sam cleared her throat in an effort to hide her smile.

"We got a match for her fingerprints." Mark briefed his captain. "Her name's Glory Wilson. She's got a short rap sheet with a couple of arrests for drug possession and prostitution."

"Have we got the autopsy results yet?"

"Not yet, but according to the doctors from the ER she died from blunt trauma that caused a massive amount of internal bleeding."

"Of course," Sam interjected. "That woman took a brutal beating."

"Did you get her pimp?" Bennett reclined back on his chair.

"Ex-pimp," Mark clarified.

"What do you mean?" Bennett lifted a curious eyebrow.

"According to some of Glory's friends, she quit hooking some months ago."

"That's not an easy job to walk away from." Sam's brow furrowed. "It must have left a lot of people less than pleased."

"One in particular," Mark added.

"Which bring us back to the pimp," Captain Bennett leaned forward and interlaced his fingers. "What do we have on him?"

"A solid alibi," Mark smirked. "He was arrested for drunken drive the night Glory was attacked."

"Could you track any witnesses?"

"The first officers at the scene said that the boy was the only one there. But there was a surveillance camera behind the restaurant where Glory was found," Sam filled him in. "We sent the tapes to the lab yesterday."

"What about that man harassing the doctor at the hospital, any confirmation on his ID?"

"Yes and no," Mark answered cryptically. "There was a Sergeant Martin Miller on the force but he wasn't from Domestic Violence." He handed a folder to his superior. "In fact, all the records about him stop in 1995."

Captain Bennett's eyebrows furrowed in puzzlement as he flipped through the file. "What happened to him?"

"Now that's the real mystery." Mark's brow furrowed. "Nobody knows. According to his partner he went out for some coffee and never came back. It's like he just disappeared into thin air for twelve years."

"Until now," Sam added under her breath as she watched her captain skim over the pages of the file.

"He didn't disappear..." Bennett's expression hardened. "He ran. This guy is a tough customer. He was a dirty cop that had been on the take for years. I remember Internal Affairs was about to nail his ass when he took off." Bennett frowned as he hastily read through the file. "I've never seen so many suspensions and reprimands for misconducts." He slammed the file shut and chewed his lower lip. "This is getting weird. What was he doing at the hospital?"

"He seemed very eager to see the boy." Sam spoke up.

"Where is this kid now?" Bennett alternated his gaze between the two partners.

"Social Services took him to a classified location," Mark informed.

"Did he ID the aggressor yet?"

"No, sir, he's still not talking. But we do have a psychiatrist working with him."

"Good!" Bennett nodded his approval then studied the case file carefully before issuing his orders. "Alright, go back to the hospital and see if they have any records of abused women cases in the past six months."

"You got it, boss." Mark nudged Sam's shoulder and they turned for the door.

"And talk to that doctor again," Bennett called out after them. "See if she can give us anything new on our Sergeant Houdini."

"Yes, sir" Mark stopped to sneer at Sam but his teasing didn't last long.

"Mathews?"

Bennett's gruff voice stopped Sam in mid step. She turned to face him. "Yes sir?"

"Hand me your detective shield, will you?" Bennett rose from his chair and stood with his arm stretched outward.

The whites of Sam's eyes became more evident as a cold sheen of perspiration beaded up on her upper lip. Had she actually heard him correctly? Did he just ask her to give up her badge? How could she? Giving it up would be like giving up her life. Faster than the seconds could tick by, all those agonizing weeks of pain battling back to normalcy, her normalcy, stood out in her mind.

"This can't be happening." Sam's tone was flat and disbelieving as a look of utter confusion settled on her face.

Seeing her trepidation Mark surged ahead to come to the aid of his partner. "But Captain, she's been-

"Promoted to sergeant," Bennett tossed her a new badge. "Congratulations."

The relief that washed over Sam was so overwhelmingly that it left her dazed. It took Sam a second or two to recover completely. However, her high-speed reflexes kicked in faster and she caught her new ranking shield in midair. She returned Mark's sneer of a minute ago with one of her own as she glanced over at him. "About time, don't you think?"

Mark smiled cockily. "Yes, but I'm still your lieutenant."

"Bite me," Sam muttered.

"Watch it or I bust the two of you down to patrolmen and you'll be walking a beat tomorrow," Bennett called out through the nearly closed door. "You both look good in blues! Don't think I don't remember it."

The familiarity of the retort brought a felling of comfort to Sam. Slowly a smug grin eased over her face. "Yep, it sure is good to be back!"

Inside the elevator Mark studied Sam's pensive look. He knew something wasn't right but he couldn't put his finger on it yet. Since they left the captain's office Sam hadn't uttered a word with more than two syllables in it.

"Did you see the game last night?" Mark tried to start small talk.

"Yes"

"Were you at Leo's?"

"No"

"How did you like that play of the game when they hit the basket from half court?"

"Okay."

Her limited answers increased his concern.

"Are you okay, Sam?"

"Fine"

Knowing his friend well, Mark decided to probe without pushing it too far.

"So, you got a promotion, a considerable raise and a chance to see the cute doctor for the second time in less than forty-eight hours." Mark teased as they reached the parking floor. "Not bad for your first day back."

"Uh-huh," Sam nodded and bit the inside of her lower lip. Once the door opened she headed for the car.

Mark unlocked the car and got in. He waited patiently for his partner to do the same. Second by second the time grew longer until finally Sam opened the door and leaned down into the car.

"Listen Mark, why don't you go ahead to hospital while I go check if there's any news from the lab?"

"What?" his brows furrowed in confusion.

"You don't need me at the hospital. I thought I could put some pressure to fast forward the lab results. This way we could be killing two birds with one stone before our guy is out killing someone else. "

Without a word Mark got out and closed the car door. He walked over to the passenger side of the car and leaned his back side against the fender before crossing his arms over his chest.

"Ok, Sam," Mark looked nonchalantly about the parked cars. "What am I missing here?"

"What do you mean?" She closed the car door and mimicked his pose.

"I mean you put me on a wild goose chase after some kind of angel hallucination. Skillfully, I come up with solid information and when you finally have the opportunity to get close to her, you chicken out?"

"I'm not chickening out." Sam shot defensively.

"Yes, you are."

"No, I'm not"

They both stared at one another for a few seconds then looked away as if they were headed back to their neutral corners.

"Then, why do I have the impression that you want to avoid seeing her?" Mark placed his hands on his hips impatiently.

"I'm not avoiding. I'm...I'm...just," Sam pushed off from the car and took a few steps ahead letting her head drop. "I don't know what to say."

"Now that's a first, little Miss Sweet Talker left speechless."

"Have you ever had someone save your life, Mark?" Sam looked at her partner straight in the eye. "I'm not talking metaphorically here. What would you say to someone who pulled you back from the brink of death and breathed new life into you?"

"I'd start off with a simple 'Thank you, Doc' and see where it leads from there." Mark shrugged nonchalantly. "Sam, don't be such a ninny about this and let tunnel vision blind you. Look at the big picture here. She saved your life; maybe she's also given you new hope to leave the past where it is instead of continuing dredging up."

"Mark..." Sam cautioned.

"Sam, do you think I'd have the family that I do if I didn't take a chance at getting Allison's phone number at that murder scene? No, I wouldn't. It's time to move on. You deserve a chance like everyone else. Do it and get it over with before you beat yourself to death over it." He watched as she opened her mouth to protest. "Do it for me, Sam."

"What can I offer her? The woman is engaged to Bruce Wayne, for God's sake. The man has everything: money, impressive job, looks, fancy car-"

"He does?" Mark squeaked. "I don't remember that being in the report."

"I ran his name through the DMV files, Mark. We're cops, it's what we do."

"So, you are interested," he watched Sam's face for any indication.

"I was until I had all the reasons not to be."

"Love isn't about things, Sam. It's about the heart. The question that needs answering is: Is he giving her his heart? Sounds to me like they are a match made in heaven and you know what they say about those." Mark paused for emphasis. "It's too good to be true."

"He can give her a life of a princess in their own little family with children. What about me? What can I offer her? A good fuck? An alternative lifestyle? A relationship without

commitment? Or better yet, a choice between adoption and a test tube to have a baby with?"

"You know what? I think my children are right..." Mark snorted crossing his arms over his chest. "You are sad and alone."

"Fuck you!"

"No, I mean it. You need to find someone."

"No, I need to get back to the lab and keep my mind busy." Sam chose a strategic retreat in avoidance of any more confrontation. "I've had enough of this romance bullshit." She turned around and started back to the elevator grumbling under her breath. "What I need is to get laid and put it all behind me."

Mark watched helplessly as his friend run away from her feelings.

"You're so mistaken my friend. I only wish you can see it before it's too late."

Having said his belief, Mark entered his car and drove off.

Continued...

**Warrior Angel's Scrolls
Index Page**

~ Badges and Needles ~
by Warrior Angel

Hey Guys,

Sorry it took me so long to update this, but here you go...

Remember feedback's always welcome!

WA.

For disclaimers see Part 1

Part 10

Ann stood at the beach admiring its beauty. There was something familiar about this scenery. The feeling of the sand against her bare feet was warm and comforting, as it was the smell of the ocean carried by the soft breeze that blew gently against her loose white dress and blonde hair.

"I know this place."

"We've been here before."

Ann recognized the voice whispering in her ear. One fast spin and she was face to face with bright blue eyes.

"Why are you haunting me?"

Ann's tunnel vision lessened and more features came into her view as a charming, yet lopsided grin broke on the figure's face.

"Am I?"

Confused by the emergence of more than a pair of haunting eyes, Ann couldn't tear her gaze from the easily identified woman standing before her. It was Sam. By the time Ann regained her senses Sam started to walk away.

"Wait," Ann called out.

Sam turned and her blue eyes beckoned Ann. An outstretched hand cemented the invitation. "Come," Sam requested walking through a door that appeared in the middle of the beach.

Ann's interest was peaked and she couldn't fight the urge to follow. She jogged toward the open door and crossed the threshold only to have it slam shut once she was through it.

By the time the reverberating noise echoed in her ears Ann had been transported into an all too familiar setting of a trauma room where she was reliving her first glimpse of life slipping away in a pair of blue eyes.

"No! Not again," Ann cried out and rushed forward using her bare hands to stop the blood flowing out of Sam's chest. "Come on, you can't leave me. I saved you before, I'll save you again."

As she'd done the first time, Ann scrambled onto the stretcher and straddled Sam's hips. Ann's movement was followed by an intense erotic feeling as she felt her clothes been stripped away from her body. Dazed by the desire that started in her inner center, Ann felt cold air hit her already hardening nipples. Feeling the anticipation of passion building up set Ann ablaze as the chill was soon replaced by the warmth of Sam's naked body pressed beneath her own. Sam sat up

and Ann embraced her tightly against her chest digging her nails into her blue-eyed goddess shoulders as a wave of arousal washed over her.

"What's happening to me?" Ann whispered breathlessly against Sam's ear.

"Don't you know?"

Blue eyes pierced through Ann's soul warming her from the inside out.

"I-" A ringing sound coming from afar interrupted Ann's line of thoughts. She chose to ignore it and kissed Sam full on the lips.

But the ringing wouldn't stop and Sam pulled away from their kiss.

"Aren't you gonna get that?"

"I don't want to." Ann could feel the softness of Sam's lips against her skin as a bout of butterfly's kisses was planted on her throat.

"It might be important."

"I don't wanna leave you." Ann whispered struggling against heavy eyelids.

"Wherever you go, I'm at your side."

The louder the ringing grew in Ann's ears, the more Sam's image began to fade until it was all but a lingering essence in her mind.

Ann mumbled incoherently as she stretched to reach her cell phone.

"H...hello" she greeted the caller hoarsely.

"Hey, baby. Did I wake you?"

Ann cleared her throat while registering the voice on the line "Joe?"

"Yeah, it's me. Did I wake you?"

"No it's okay. I should be getting up anyway." She explained failing to stifle a yawn.

"Busy shift yesterday?"

"More like last night."

"Are you taking the night shifts?"

"No. I was just covering for a colleague." Ann fought hard to keep her eyes open.

"Good, then I assume that you're free tonight."

"Yeah, I guess so. Why?"

"Cause I just landed in New York and I'm dying to take my girl out for a romantic date. What do you say?"

Ann hesitated for a few seconds wondering if this would be such a good idea. Part of her tired mind wanted to be put at rest while the other part was hoping she could go back to her interrupted dream and make some sense out of it. But she realized she had no plausible reason to refuse his invitation, and honestly, she couldn't argue about anything at that moment, so she resigned.

"Okay."

Ann's lazy answer didn't affect Joe's excitement.

"Great. I'll pick you up at eight. You choose the place."

"Fine..." Ann agreed as another yawn prevented her from saying more.

"Alright baby go back to sleep. I'll see you tonight."

After he hung up and Ann tossed the telephone across the bed sinking back against her pillows.

"This is so not right."

She stared at the ceiling wondering how to handle the emotional mess she was getting herself into.

"Alright Sam, remind me why I'm here." Leo followed his sister as they were led through the elegant restaurant.

"Cause my date happens to have an unmarried, straight sister and I," Sam turned and smiled cynically, "have you."

"Yeah?"

"Yes." Sam slid into her designated seat as her brother followed suit.

"Well, I just want to point out how ridiculous this is..." Leo hesitated as the waiter set their drinks down. "Thanks," he said with a pleasant smile. When the waiter's back was turned, he

pointed his rueful gaze toward the woman opposite him. "Jesus, Sam. You let an eight year old boy set you up on a blind date."

"Weren't you the one egging me on to accept it?" Sam lifted a challenging eyebrow.

"Well yes, but-"

"If it's good enough for your sister, it's good enough for you too, bro."

He snorted then took in the restaurant opulent atmosphere. "At least this place is nice. Who chose it?"

"I did." Sam sipped her beverage. "I like it here. It's perfect for a date."

"Let's hope our ladies are worth it." Leo rolled his eyes apprehensively making Sam chuckle.

"How long has it been since you've been on a blind date, Leo?"

"I don't need blind dates to get women, sis. I have..." he cleared his throat, "or can get all the women I want. You, on the other hand, haven't had a date ever since-"

"I was shot," Sam deadpanned.

"Well, there is that." Leo paused. "In this case a blind date is a good way for you to get your feet wet again among other things." Leo winked knowingly. "Now, for me-"

"Have some faith, brother. We might have a good time tonight."

"Fine, what are their names?" He sipped his beer.

"The Johnson sisters," Sam sneered when he nearly choked through his swallow.

"I have a bad feeling about this."

"Relax, Leo. Mark said Miss Johnson is, and I quote him here, 'so cute that she makes me want to go back to second grade'."

"Well, at least Mark has a good taste in women."

"He does," Sam agreed with a chuckle. "Did you know he thinks I'm hot?"

"Of course." Leo shrugged nonchalantly before biting a carrot stick.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Everybody knows Mark has a crush on you." He threw her a curious look.

"No, he doesn't," she shot indignantly.

"Sure he does. He's had a crush on you since high school. Toby and I used to tease him about it all the time."

Sam looked at her brother long and hard. "You're kidding, right?"

"Nope," Leo gloated. "He kept finding lame excuses to go by the house. Things like studying with Toby." He snorted loudly. "Please! Don't tell me you didn't at least get an inkling of it?"

"Never! I must have a bad reception antenna for straight flirtation," Sam smirked. "But I should have known something was up considering our big brother was never a fan of the books."

"Exactly" Leo winked knowingly at her.

Sam let her brother's words sink in. "Do you think Allison knows?"

"Hell yeah!" Leo starred at his sister incredulously. "You really didn't know about his crush?"

"Of course not," Sam shot defensively. "I hope Allison doesn't think anything bad out of it."

"Don't worry, she's okay with it."

Sam's look turned to one of horror. "How do you know?"

"I overheard her talking to mother the other day. She said something about 'platonic adoration' or something. I wasn't paying attention." He waved a dismissive hand at her. "What I do know is that Allison is a great woman and she knows that you're as gay as Ellen is funny."

"She'd better." Sam shifted her gaze away. "Besides, Mark's as much of a brother to me as you and Toby."

"Relax, sis. Allison is a very wise woman and her kids are going to get nice Christmas presents if those are the Johnson sisters." He nodded toward two beautiful women approaching their table.

"Huh?" Sam followed her brother's gaze. "Oh yeah! Nice, big presents," her voice trailed off as the women came closer.

"Sam?"

"That's me." Sam smiled as she stood up.

"Hi, I'm Phoebe and this is my sister Hope."

Sam took the short-haired woman's hand firmly in hers noticing a couple of small exoteric tattoos on the busty woman's arm. The look in her eye suggested that Phoebe's wildness ran deeper than her skin.

Leo immediately rose and took the other woman's hand in his. Hope wasn't as feisty as her sister. On the contrary, there was a certain sweetness about her that gave her an air of naivety.

"Hi, I'm Leo." He smiled charmingly at the cute brunette. "I sure 'Hope' you're my date!" He winked flirtingly.

Hope threw a shy glance in her sister's direction and both women chuckled at the puzzled look shared by the siblings.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you but I'm the gay sister." Hope offered tenderly before slipping her hand from Leo's and extending it toward Sam.

Phoebe moved to Leo's side with a mischievous look on her face. "Look's like you're stuck with me."

A wild grin broke on his features as he took an appreciatively look at the sexy woman.

"Couldn't ask for more."

Sam and Leo each moved toward their respective dates' seat and held their chairs for them.

"Please, have a seat," Sam said politely.

The sisters shared satisfied grins at the offered courtesies.

"Thank you," came their reply in unison.

"Would you like to order a drink?" Sam offered.

"What are you having?" Hope asked politely.

"Beer!" Sam and Leo answered spontaneously.

"Beer is fine for me." Hope offered a coy smile before looking at Phoebe who studied the menu intently.

"I'll have a dry martini, please." Phoebe flashed a confident smirk at the man sitting across the table.

"Nice choice." Leo sent her a seductive grin of his own and signaled to the waiter. "Let's get this evening started."

Joe handed his car keys to the valet parking attendant and moved around to the passenger side extending a hand to his fiancée. With a gentle tug he helped Ann out of the car and arm in arm the stunning couple entered the restaurant where the maitre'd greeted them.

"Table for two?"

Joe nodded with an air of aristocratic dignity.

A raised eyebrow from the maitre'd signaled them to follow. With a sharp turn the tuxedo dressed man led them straight to the dining room. He wove in and around a few tables before coming to a stop.

"Will this do?" The maitre'd pointed to an empty table with pristine place settings near the center of the room.

"Yes, thank you." Joe looked at the fashionable accommodations. "This is a nice place, sweetie. It was a good choice."

A waiter emerged behind Joe and pulled out a chair for him as the maitre'd did the same for Ann.

"Thank you." Ann took in her surrounds. "I like it here. It has a wonderful energy."

The restaurant had a distinct décor with intimate lightening. Soft music played in the background providing a relaxing atmosphere. The far wall had a reddish tint that contrasted with the candle lit tables creating a romantic backdrop. Ann glanced over the room until her eyes set on a corner table and she turned pale. Ann felt her heart stopped pumping as she saw the woman responsible for her recent emotional turmoil sitting right across the room.

It can't be her.

But it was. Instantly, pieces of Ann's earlier dream popped into her mind. Unconsciously, Ann's body started to react. Her heart quickened and a warmth settled deep in her core. The sensation made Ann lick her lips, willing that she could get lost in sky-blue eyes without another thought to time or place. If the truth could be told, Ann wanted to undress Sam and gently press their naked bodies together in a slow, sexy dance. The mere thought of Sam's hands moving up and down soothing her bare back as she allowed her fingertips to explore every inch of Sam's sexy body nearly drove her insane with arousal.

A light touch on her arm brought Ann out of her musing. Sensing the wetness in her panties she turned bright red. No person had ever aroused her like that, not even Joe.

"Are you feeling okay, Ann? You look all flushed."

"Am I?" Ann used the back of her hands to feel her reddish cheeks. "I am a little hot. Perhaps it's a little stuffy in here."

"Ann, I'm dressed in more clothing than you are and I'm perfectly fine. I'm not feeling stuffy at all. Are you sure you're not coming down with something?"

"No, I'm fine." Ann felt a twinge of guilt, and averted her eyes. "Listen, why don't you choose a nice bottle of wine while I go freshen up a bit?"

"Are you sure you're okay?" Concern was written all over Joe's face.

"Yeah, I'm alright." Ann stood up hastily. "I won't be long." She quickly moved away from the table and disappeared before he could reply.

Suddenly her strategic retreat didn't seem such a nice idea once the owner of a very familiar pair of eyes obscured her path.

Oh God, please don't let her see me.

Her prayers were answered by a simple act of chivalry. Sam swooped down to retrieve something that the wavy-haired brunette had dropped. Those few seconds were just enough for Ann to get past them undetected.

Once safely in the alcove leading to the restrooms, Ann rested with her back up against the wall.

"Good God, that was close." She leaned into the door and opened it, her heart still pounding in her ears.

That's when Ann's inner voice came to life.

You're such a school girl.

"Quit it!" she muttered louder than she intended causing a few set of eyes to turn to her. Embarrassed once again, she felt a blush covering her cheeks as she ran a nervous hand through her hair.

Shit, I'm going insane.

Leo's cheerful nature could liven up any party. The man had the ability to crack jokes about almost everything and he wouldn't waste an opportunity when the 'Looney Tunes' ringtone started coming from inside Hope's purse.

"Hey, Bugs Bunny's calling!" Leo injected without a second thought to the visibly blushing woman who hastily dug inside her purse to retrieve her phone but her nervous fingers let it slip and fall.

Sam's quick reactions allowed her agile fingers to scoop it up before it even touched the floor.

"Here you are." Sam swooped up from her deep bow and returned the phone with a captivating smile.

"Thank you, Sam." Sam's nimbleness had a hypnotic effect over the shy woman. "You're very sweet."

"Oh, yeah that's my sister," Leo teased. "She's practically a pot of honey."

Sam snorted and the girls chuckled at Leo's boyish humor.

"If you excuse me ladies, I need to hit the little boys' room." He stood up and bowed at the ladies before shooting an impatient look at Sam.

"What?" Sam played dumb.

"Come on sis, the beer has worked its way down to my bladder."

"Leo, you do realize that you and I don't pee in the same room, don't you?"

"I know." He narrowed his eyes at her.

"What's the matter, Leo?" Sam smirked provocatively. "Afraid you won't find your way back without a guide?"

"Come on, Sam I really have to go."

"Oh all right. I'll take your hand and walk you to the men's room." Taking pity on him, Sam rose. "If you'll be kind enough to excuse us, ladies,"

"No problem. I'm not going anywhere." Phoebe blew a kiss in Leo's direction receiving a sexy grin as an answer. Phoebe seemed to be enjoying his humorous flirtation as much as Hope seemed to be overtaken by Sam's effortless charm.

"Don't be too long, Sam." Hope chimed in as the siblings made their way toward the restrooms.

"So what do you think?" Leo whispered.

"Think about what?"

"The girls," his voice became more intense. "What else is there to think about?"

Sam shrugged. "They're okay."

"Okay? Come on, they're hot and they are so into us."

"Yeah, I think so too."

The lack of enthusiasm on Sam's voice caused Leo to shake his head exasperatedly. "Great, you have your 'one-night-stand' look on your face."

"What, were you expecting that I would fall in love at first sight?"

"No, but I thought you might be ready for something a little deeper."

"You're sounding like Mark." Sam crossed her arms impatiently. "What's the matter? Have you two ganged up to find me a girlfriend?"

"Maybe we're just worried about you, pig head."

"I'm fine and I don't need any cupids to straighten out my love life." She shooed him. "Now go pee before you wet your pants."

When he disappeared inside the men's room, she threaded her fingers through her dark locks.

"Brothers!" Sam left out an exasperated sigh but inwardly she knew her brother was right. It's like the whole 'doctor angel' episode had awakened a long dormant desire for romance. Unfortunately, the woman that had, literally, set her heart going again was beyond her reach.

Pathetic! That's what you are.

"Oh, shut up! Just wash your face and get back into a dating mood." Sam mumbled and reached for the ladies' room door just as an elderly woman stepped out. Politely, she stepped aside allowing the woman to walk by then entered the apparently empty room and made a beeline directly to the sink. The sound of a stall door opening made Sam look into the mirror. Her movements stilled the moment she saw a blonde angel staring right back at her reflection in the mirror.

"This can't be happening." Ann's voice was little above a whisper.

Sam stood dumbfounded. She could swear she heard something being said, but no coherent thought entered her mind as a mix of emotion swirled like magic around her. After a few seconds, Sam had to coach herself to breath again.

"Hi, doc...I mean, hi Ann." She amended turning around to face Ann. "I didn't see you outside."

Ann stared deeply into azure eyes. Within seconds she could feel the gravitational force pulling her closer to Sam.

"I saw you." Ann confessed taking another step forward. "It seems like I always see you...around that is."

Unconsciously, Sam took a step forward as well. "What does it mean?"

"I don't know," Ann whispered when they were so close that she could smell the soothing combined scents of sandalwood and jasmine emanating from Sam. Both women had their gaze firmly fixed on one another. Somewhat hesitantly, Ann raised her hand and caressed Sam's face. Without realizing it, Sam leaned into the contact as if it was the most natural thing to do.

This feels like...home.

A wave of warmth washed over Sam.

"It feels so real," Ann whispered.

The phrase was said with such intensity that it caused a low burn to ignite deep in Sam's belly and she found herself returning Ann's gaze and enjoying the moment they were caught in.

A knock at the door broke their concentration causing Ann to yank her hand away as if Sam's face was on fire.

The absence of Ann's touch left Sam feeling abandoned and homesick.

"Hey Sam, you're okay in there?" Leo's muffled voice snapped Sam back to reality.

"Yeah, I'm fine. Everything's fine." She closed her eyes to compose herself and avoid Ann's gaze. "I'll be out in a sec."

"Hurry it up, we don't want to keep our ladies waiting."

Leo's words were like a bucket of icy water thrown right over their heads. They not only killed the mood but also left both women feeling vulnerable and anxious.

"You're on a date," Ann deadpanned.

Sam felt sick in her stomach. "And you're..."

"With my boyfriend," Ann stated then quickly corrected her slip. "Fiancé...He's my fiancé!"

"Too complicated..." Sam stated.

An apologetic smile edged onto Ann's face.

Sam closed her eyes feeling the sickness turning into a piercing pain on the pit of her stomach. She shoved it down and looked into Ann's tumultuous green eyes.

"We're hopeless," Ann whispered and closed her eyes.

Sam felt like her heart was going to burst from inside her chest.

Kiss her.

Sam's heart and mind were at war as her inner thoughts screamed out opposite instructions.

Don't waste your time, leave.

Undecided as to what direction to go, Sam chose a hasty retreat. When she was just about ready to make her move Sam leaned in and brushed her lips against the corner of Ann's mouth.

"Bye, Ann."

Ann opened her eyes, but Sam was already gone. She reached to her cheek on the spot Sam had touched her and felt the skin tingling. Ann started toward the door but decided against it after hearing muffled voices coming through the half opened door.

"Finally! What took you so long?"

"Shut up, Leo"

"Are you okay, Sam?"

The door slammed shut preventing Ann from hearing Sam's answer. Ann stared at the mirror and watched her blonde brows furrowed as the reality of the situation slowly set in.

"Are you okay?" Ann repeated to herself, feeling her stomach flutter. The short interaction had sent her through several loops in this emotional roller coaster she was on. She let her head hang and scrubbed her face with slightly shaking hands.

"Well, I for one definitely am not."

Continued...

~ Badges and Needles ~

by Warrior Angel

For disclaimers see Part 1

Part 11

Sam was flying on the automatic pilot this morning while her mind kept drifting back to the brief encounter she'd had the night before. The image of Ann's face, her smile, the softness of Ann's skin under her lips made it impossible for Sam to focus on anything else. That was until the tiny scrapings of a key being placed on her front door alerted her ever-present detective senses. Sam's hand reached for her gun holstered under her left arm while her suspicious gaze held the door in high esteem. She quickly ran through the list of possibilities in her mind. No one, whether it was lover or even her own mother, had a key to her apartment. She thought for a moment listening as the key turned in the lock. As the tumbled began to click in an effort to unlock, Sam remembered the one person in the world that she'd ever trusted enough to have given her key to.

"Leo," Sam said with relief, shifting her hand away from her weapon as the door opened into her line of sight.

"Morning, sis," Leo smiled charmingly as he slipped the key from the lock and closed the door.

"I thought I gave you a key for emergency use only like as when I die."

"Well, it's an emergency to me. I'm hungry." He joined her behind the kitchen's breakfast bar and ogled the nearly finished bowl of cereal sitting in front of her.

"Don't you have food at your own place?"

"Nope, I let you keep it here for me."

Sam rolled her eyes. "That's a lame excuse for hanging around here."

"Got any cereal left?" Leo started rummaging through the cabinets.

"Do I look like a grocery store to you?" Sam got up from her stool and placed her bowl in the sink.

"What's with the sour mood?" Leo frowned when she jostled him aside on her way out of the kitchen. "Don't tell me Hope goes by the 'no sex on the first date' rule? Cause her sister sure doesn't." He smiled obnoxiously ignoring Sam's scowl as he poured cereal into his hand. "I'm telling you, Sam, the woman is a volcano."

"Save it Leo. And FYI Hope doesn't have any rules against sex either." She nodded toward the door. "You just missed her."

"You go girl!" He cheered around a mouthful of cereal. "So what's the matter? Was she that bad? Cause if that's the problem I'm sure she can take a few lessons from her sister-"

"No pervert, that's not it."

"Then what's wrong?" he swallowed his cereal and narrowed his eyes at her.

Sam stared out the window contemplating what to say. "Have you ever cheated on someone, Leo?"

"Yes..." He answered cautiously.

"How did it make you feel?"

"What does that have to do with the price of eggs anyway?" Confusion was plastered all over his face. "Okay Sam, I'll bite. You're not cheating on anyone, are you?"

"No, but last night, I...I felt like I was."

"Cheating on whom?" His brows furrowed in a quandary as the words shot out of his mouth.

"Myself, maybe," Sam smirked as she sat down on the couch.

"Sis, are you back on those meds again?" Leo grabbed the box of cereal and a bowlful of milk then plopped down on the couch next to his sister. When no answer came to his question, Leo sat there staring at the sister he thought he'd known. He watched as one blue orb shifted only slightly in his direction.

"What?" Leo garbled out through a mouthful of cereal.

"Why would you think that?"

"Either you're on drugs or you're drunk because, honestly, you're not making any sense." Leo shook his head stuffing another spoonful of cereal into his mouth.

Sam's reply was truncated in mid thought by the sound of her cell phone coming to life. She checked the caller ID then answered it.

"Morning, Mark."

"Was that Miss Johnson I saw coming out of your apartment building about twenty minutes ago?"

"That would be correct." Sam glared at Leo when he spilled some milk over the coffee table.

"You had that date with her last night, right?" Mark continued.

"Yes, and well into this morning, I might add." She teased.

"God, sometimes I really miss being single."

Sam chuckled. "Is there a particular reason for you to be around here so early?"

"Captain Bennett called me on my way to dropping the kids off at school this morning. It seems that our little boy witness had a minor breakdown. Social Services took him back to the hospital. The Captain wants us there in case our fellow sergeant decides to make an appearance."

"I'll meet you at the hospital." Sam hung up, grabbed her jacket and rushed for the door.

"You're almost out of cereal, you know." Leo refilled his bowl before propping his feet up on the coffee table.

"Yeah? Tell it to the good fairy when she comes around to do your dishes."

"Like I'm going to be here when that happens," Leo muttered flipping through the TV channels.

"Later, Bro." Sam stood to leave. "And I'd think about washing those dishes if you want me to keep housing your food supply." She headed out the door not waiting for a comeback.

Diving head first into work was Ann's best strategy to forget any emotional problem. This time however, it didn't seem so easy to dodge the situation.

One thoughtless moment on her part had sent her crashing right back into the very nightmare she was trying to escape.

Always check the caller ID... Always check the caller ID.

Why she hadn't looked at her caller ID before answering her cell phone she'll never know. And now, here she was trying to explain to her boyfriend something she couldn't even explain to herself as she paced the length of Doctor's Lounge with her cell phone poised at her ear.

"No, Joe...I can't...I can't tell you what's wrong when I don't even know it."

Ann turned abruptly at the sound of the door creaking open to view Danni poke her head into the opening of the door. Seeing the intense concentration on Ann's face, Danni stopped in mid step.

And the cavalry enters right on cue. A look of relief fell over Ann's face and she silently motioned for her friend to enter.

"Listen, Joe, I don't think we should have this talk over the phone and...what?" Ann stopped pacing and her shoulders dropped.

"No, Joe, just because I didn't want to have sex with you last night doesn't mean that I'm sleeping with someone else."

Ann warded off Danni's questioning eyebrow with a 'don't ask' look of her own.

"Like I said before, I don't think we should be having this conversation right now. I swear this has nothing to do with you... Yes, I believe we need sometime to think... Of course, you don't need time but that doesn't mean that I have all the answers... I don't know, a break, maybe... Yes, I think we need a break, Joe..."

Ann turned away from Danni and played mindlessly with the coffee machine.

"No, I'm not breaking up with you over the phone. Please Joe, I'm just asking for some time, okay?"

Ann turned around and resumed her pacing.

"No, don't call me. I'll call you when I'm ready to talk... Yes, I promise... Alright, take care."

Ann hung up and slumped unceremoniously on the couch next to her astonished looking friend.

"Did you just dump dull boy?" Danni had a priceless look on her face.

"I guess I did...sort of." Ann replied weakly letting the situation sink in.

"Do you want to talk about it?"

"Have you ever had this feeling that you should run as far as you can from something but at the same time, there's this urge inside you that makes you want to do just the opposite?" Ann asked expectantly.

"Yeah, it happens every time I pass by a shoe store." Danni shrugged nonchalantly. "Seriously now, what's going on?"

"It's...I don't...I don't really know what's going on," Ann confessed throwing her head back and hiding her face behind her palms.

"Okay, you lost me." Danni stood up shaking her head in exasperation.

"Tell me about it," Ann snorted and ran both hands through her hair.

"Spill it, doc." Danni put her hands on her hips authoritatively. "What the hell is going on?"

Ann debated for a few seconds whether to voice her feelings or not, but the length of her debate was cut short by the sound of her pager going off.

"Hey, look at that, an emergency!" Ann took her stethoscope and placed it around her neck before fleeing from the room. "I gotta go."

Danni stood with the look of utter astonishment on her face as Ann whisked by her.

"You can run, but you can't hide," Danni shouted after her. "Especially not from yourself"

"Man, I hate this place." Sam fought a shiver travel down her spine the second the ER doors opened in front of her and Mark.

"Still having nightmares?" Mark threw a sympathetic look over at his friend.

"Not as frequently, but every once in a while one will pay me a visit" Sam chewed her lower lip.

"You should talk to someone."

"I'm talking to you, aren't I?" Sam smirked.

Mark narrowed his eyes. "Smart ass!"

They were about to flash their badges at the reception desk, when Mark spied a familiar face.

"Hey, look. There's Dr. Wolchek." Mark pointed to a tall, bald, middle aged man talking to a young and slim African-American woman. "He's the shrink treating the boy."

The two cops approached the couple and Mark offered his hand in greeting to the man.

"Doctor Wolchek, it's nice to see you again."

"Lieutenant Stevens, I'm glad you here." Wolchek shook Mark's hand before addressing to the woman standing next to him. "This is Mrs. Lynch. She's the social worker attending Justin's case."

"Justin?" Mark's brow furrowed.

"That's the boy's name." Mrs. Lynch clarified.

"It means he's talking, then." Sam jumped in half assuming, half asking.

"I'm sorry. This is my partner, Sgt. Mathews." Mark introduced Sam before cutting to the most important question on his mind. "Does the boy know anything about the murder?"

"I'm pretty sure he knows something. But every time I try to approach the subject, he withdraws and shuts the door to his mind." Wolchek took his glasses off and started cleaning them.

"Did you at least find out if he's connected to the victim?" Sam fired off another question.

Mrs. Lynch glanced at the psychiatrist before answering. "She was his mother."

"Fuck!" Mark ran a nervous hand through his hair nearly jumping when the door behind him opened to reveal a concerned looking doctor.

"I'm sorry, Doctor Thomas, I didn't mean to say it that loud."

Ann was somewhat startled to see Mark and most of all, Sam standing in the hall. Blinking a couple of times, she managed to recover fast and cover her surprise.

"No harm done, Lieutenant. I say it myself sometimes even louder." Ann nodded in greeting, sharing a weak smile with Sam. "It is good to see you both again."

"Dr. Thomas, how's Justin doing?" Mrs. Lynch asked truly concerned.

"There's nothing physically wrong with him. We ran blood tests and even did a head CT," Ann explained flipping through the patient's file. "All results are negative. We can only assume that what he's presenting are some kind of psychosomatic symptoms."

"That's what I thought." Dr. Wolchek came forward. "May I see the file?"

"Of course." She handed it to him.

"What are his symptoms, anyway?" Sam pressed.

Ann turned to answer. "He's having an intermittent fever and occasional seizures." She looked straight into Sam's eyes and struggled against her racing heart. "We ran every test we could think of, but like I said, they all come back normal."

Good, she's so beautiful. Sam fought the intense urge to move even closer and wrap her arms around Ann.

"And what do we do now?" Sam was having a hard time to keep her nerves under control.

"I'll ask the psychiatrist on duty to come down and make an evaluation to see if we can admit him for a couple of days."

"Can't Doctor Wolchek sign the admission?" Mark asked concernedly.

"I'm afraid not." Ann shook her head. "It's hospital policy. The patient can only be admitted by an attending physician on staff."

"She's right. I'm not a staff member here." Dr. Wolchek handed the file back to Ann. "Do you mind if I come with you, Dr Thomas?"

"No, of course not" Ann smiled politely doing her best to avoid the blue eyes that were staring down at her and causing her knees to go wobbly. "This way," Ann forced her legs to move feeling a blush rising up to her cheeks as she felt a strong urge to touch Sam. Restraining the inappropriate thought, Ann ducked her head and retreated with Wolchek scurrying after her.

"I'll talk to the captain to see if I can manage round-the-clock security to stay here." Mark announced retrieving his cell phone from a pocket.

"I'd better go and make a couple phone calls too." Mrs. Lynch looked expectantly to Sam.

"Don't worry," Sam waved a dismissive hand at the woman. "I'll keep an eye on him."

"Thank you," Mrs. Lynch reached into her purse to retrieve a cell phone of her own.

Sam entered Justin's room. As she got closer to the bed she could see by his serene expression that he was asleep. A quick glance at the peaceful looking kid would make anyone doubt that there was something wrong with him.

I'm so sorry kid. You shouldn't have to go through all of this.

Sam's head snapped up at the sound of the door opening. Sam saw a middle-aged nurse enter the room and diligently check Justin's I.V. line and take his temperature. The frown that emerged on the woman's stern face told Sam that something wasn't right.

"What's wrong?"

"He's temperature is rising again," the nurse offered before leaving the room rather hastily.

Sam turned her attention back to the sleeping child, unconsciously taking his hand in hers.

"Come on kid, you can fight it." She whispered softly using her other hand to brush his hair gently. "Help me get the bastard who did that to your mom. I know you know something. So, please, please help me."

Sam waited as if expecting some kind of miraculous reaction on Justin's part. The lack of response caused her shoulders to slump.

"I don't even know if you're listening."

"You know, some people believe they can hear you."

The soft voice coming from behind Sam stole her breath away. She closed her eyes and swallowed dryly feeling her heart jumping right to her throat. Sam gathered all her courage and turned to see Ann moving to the other side of the bed.

"And what do you believe?" Sam tried to keep her nervousness from reflecting in her voice.

"I'm not sure." Ann smiled warmly at Sam while using her stethoscope to listen to the patient's breathing sounds. "I've never been on that side of things." She nodded toward the boy as she palpated his neck.

"I have." Sam offered watching Ann's every move wondering if at one time or another in her treatment the same thing had been done to her.

"What do you remember?"

Don't chicken now, you coward! Sam's inner voice gave her a push.

"I remember...you."

Ann's movements stilled and she fixed her gaze into deep blue eyes.

"You came to see me. I remember your voice, your smile. I haven't been able to take you out of my mind ever since."

Sam's heart thundered in her ears as Ann stared mutely at her. The pull of their connection almost made her forget that there was a bed between them. A sense of urgency washed over as she saw Ann leaning in as well. The only thing that kept her from meeting Ann half way was the sudden squeeze to her hand. Immediately it brought Sam out of her spell.

"Hey, I felt something."

"Me too," Ann said breathlessly in a daze.

Sam looked down at the smaller hand grasping hers and her efforts were rewarded with another squeeze.

"There it is again." Grinning broadly, Sam watched Justin's eyes fluttering open.

"I guess they can hear after all," Ann whispered mirroring Sam's radiant smile.

"Do you think the kid's going to ID the aggressor?" Mark rolled his neck and shoulders, popping the joints to relieve the stress from the busy day.

"I think it's just a matter of time until we know what he saw." Sam zipped up her jacket when a chilly breeze blew against her body. "I'm still counting on the pictures taken by the surveillance camera outside the bar."

"What about a nice home-made dinner to give our minds a rest, huh?" Mark offered digging the car keys from his pocket. "Allison is making lasagna tonight."

"Sounds great but I...I was...I mean..."

Mark turned to look at Sam when he realized that her attention had strayed from the conversation. A small grin reached his lips as he saw a lonely blonde figure seated on a bench outside the hospital.

Mark stepped behind Sam and whispered teasingly into her ear. "Allison's lasagna is great, but not nearly as interesting as spending some time with the cutie over there, right?" He placed his hands on Sam's back and gave her a light shove. "Now, stop being a wuss and go talk to her."

Sam turned around and shot him a threatening glare.

Ignoring her glare, Mark raised his fist making a gesture of power. "Be a man!"

Sam pondered for few seconds while alternating her gazes between Mark and Ann.

Enough with the hesitation. Her inner voice restated Mark's words. *Go talk to her.*

The sound of an engine starting made her turn to see Mark's car pulling out into traffic. Left to sort things out for herself, Sam returned her gaze to Ann and studied her more carefully.

Look at her, she's so cute.

Ann seemed to be lost in her thoughts. Her eyes were closed and the slump of her shoulders gave away her emotional outlook. Her angel might very well be in need of someone to speak to.

Talk to her, Sam's mind encouraged every step she took towards her goal. *Comfort her.*

Sam took a calming breath and put on her best smile when she reached Ann's side.

"You look like you could use a friend."

The deep voice made Ann's stomach churn and her heart jump to her throat. She opened her eyes and met a radiant flash of white teeth. The irresistible smile that was lighting Sam's face caused one to break on Ann's features as well.

"Is that an offer?" Ann teased.

"Might be," Sam shrugged and sat beside her. "People say I have broad shoulders."

Ann snorted. "I could really use a shoulder right now."

"Well, I have two." Sam said charmingly. "Feel free to borrow one or both of them if you need to."

Ann chuckled but said nothing. Instead she leaned forward a little, rested her arms on her thighs and interlaced her fingers.

"Bad day?"

"You can say that again."

Ann looked forward and squinted as if trying to make something out on the horizon.

"I lost three patients today. One of them was a fifteen-year-old girl who killed herself."

"That sucks."

Ann nodded her agreement without taking her eyes off of a far away point. "She got involved with her teacher. Her parents found out and locked her at home. They pressed charges against the man and he was arrested. The girl took her father's pistol and shot her own heart. There wasn't much we could do to help her. After that, we had to admit her mother for a twenty-four hour observation. She and her husband were devastated." Ann sat straight and used her hands to knead her shoulder muscles. "People shouldn't be judged for whom they fall in love with."

Sam couldn't ignore the sadness of Ann's tone of voice and fought hard the urge to hug her. "Is there something I can do to help?"

One quick look at sympathetic blue eyes, and the words started jumping out of Ann's mouth before she could even think about what she was saying.

"You could buy me a drink."

For a moment, Sam found herself tongue-tied. But before her inner demons could come to life, a flash of a brilliant smile followed a positive headshake.

"I'd love to."

Continued...

~ Badges and Needles ~

by Warrior Angel

For disclaimers see Part 1

Hey guys,

I'm really sorry for taking me so long to update this one. I had some personal issues that I had to deal with. But I'm back now and hope that you guys are still with me.

Anyway, keep sending me feedback, I love them!

Enjoy...

WA

Part 12

Sunlight crept through the blinds and around the drapes with every intention of illuminating the room. Off to one side, a glass sculpture filtered the beam creating a rainbow effect dappling over the bed on the opposite wall. The shimmering colors were what first caught Ann's attention. She stirred only long enough to hide her face under her right arm in an attempt to stave off the offending brightness. That lasted for only a few more minutes until the growing intensity chased her out of the land of her dreams. She turned to the side and slowly opened her eyes. Her brain quickly reacted to the bright light and between the squinting, her throbbing head, and dry mouth Ann easily diagnosed the situation.

"Great! A hangover," she groaned running a hand through her hair.

Little by little Ann began to take in on her surroundings. The color of the walls, the furniture placed around the room, the curtains and the flooring, nothing looked familiar.

Where am I?

Ann started to panic as she rolled onto her back.

"That's not my ceiling."

Confused, Ann turned to her side and her arms met big comfortable pillows. "These aren't my pillows and this is NOT my bed."

Ann's heartbeat picked up as she kicked the covers off only to be hit by a cold breeze. Looking down, Ann saw that she was wearing only a slim-fit tank top and panties. Shocked, she instantly pulled the covers up around her neck in an effort to conceal her expanses of exposed flesh.

"What the hell?" She tried to recall the events from the previous night but failed miserably. Ann moved quickly to survey the room one more time. Her actions increased the throbbing in her head ten-fold and she realized it wasn't the best decision she'd ever made.

Kill me, just kill me now.

Sinking back into the pillows she waited for the throbbing to stop. When it did, Ann turned her head slowly to the side and let her eyes wander about the room. On the nightstand there was a note, a bottle of pills, and a tall glass of water.

Reaching over, Ann took the note from under the glass and read it.

Good morning,

Sorry, but I couldn't stay to wake you up due to work. I left a couple of Tylenol for the headache you're sure to have. Drink all the water, it will help. There's hot, strong coffee in the kitchen if you want it. Feel free to take a shower or whatever else you need. Your clothes are neatly folded on the armchair near the window. I took the liberty to remove them last night, but don't worry I didn't take advantage of you!

There's food in the fridge and you can stay as long as you want to, nobody will bother you here. Anything else you need just give me a call, my card is next to the telephone.

Enjoy your stay,

Sam.

"You do know how to treat a lady, detective." A tinge of a smile crossed Ann's lips as she swallowed the Tylenol Sam had left for her.

Ann reclined back against the pillows releasing a contented sigh as glimpses of the night before started coming back to her.

Sam led Ann into a Mexican themed bar and motioned for her to proceed to an empty table. Ann watched Sam greet the bartender and smiled at the woman's natural charm as she talked to a few other costumers while she waited for their drinks to be made. Ann felt a pang in her heart as a redhead woman approached Sam and hugged her from behind whispering something into her ear. Deciding to ignore the feeling, Ann looked away and focused on the environment. The bar was darker than most, dimly illuminated only by several old fashioned railroad lights hung haphazardly around the ceiling. There was a huge Mexican flag hung on the wall behind the bar and a few stools along the counter. Ann caught sight of Sam approaching the table carrying two glasses of frozen margaritas with small sombreros on top of them.

"You said you wanted something stronger than coffee," Sam settled the drinks down. "But I thought we'd start with something light first." She winked and sat in front of Ann sending a ravishing smile in her direction. Ann's heart nearly stopped beating.

The events of the night unfolded in her daydream leaving Ann with a sense of completion filling her body as if she were finally at the place she belonged. A picture at the nightstand caught her attention. It was a photograph of Sam being squeezed in a group hug amongst three handsome men. She grabbed the picture and studied it closer. All four people were laughing and there was a happiness emanating from the impromptu family photo. Ann swallowed to get rid of a twinge of jealousy that formed in the pit of her stomach. For a moment, she wished she were the one holding Sam in the picture. She returned the frame to its place and retrieved Sam's business card.

"Samantha Matthews." Ann whispered as she played with the card until an overwhelming need to hear Sam's voice washed over her. Without a second thought she reached for a cordless phone placed on the nightstand and dialed the number inscribed on the card.

"Matthews."

Ann immediately recognized the deep, sexy voice coming across the line.

"You know, I'm not used to waking up in strange women's bed."

"Well, I'm not used to having strange women sleeping in my bed while I spend the night on the couch."

A wicked smile broke on Ann's face.

"So, shall I put my clothes on and leave?"

Ann could swear she'd heard Sam gulp. "What detective, cat got your tongue?"

What am I doing? Am I flirting with her?

"No," Sam's voice broke the silence. "Actually I was just trying to remember the last time I stripped a beautiful woman without sleeping with her."

"Look Sam," Ann said in a more serious tone. "I want to apologize for my behavior last night. I don't know what came over me to drink like that."

If the truth was to be known Ann didn't remember much of what she'd done, but she wasn't going to ask that now.

"You were upset. There's no need to apologize, Ann. You did nothing wrong."

The softness on Sam's voice comforted Ann.

"But I still want to thank you anyway, for everything." Ann paused. "You're very nice."

"Anytime, anywhere...you just give me a call dear lady."

Ann's heart started doing back-flips and she wished she could see Sam's face.

"Listen..."

"Sam..." they spoke at the same time.

"You go first," Sam offered.

"Okay, I was wondering if...uh...if we could get together again sometime," Ann started tentatively. "Perhaps you might even consider this weekend, maybe. What do you say?"

"I'd love to."

"Good. I'll call you to arrange the details." Ann tried to keep her enthusiasm from her voice.

"I'm looking forward to it."

Ann hesitated; her mind running for an excuse to keep the conversation going, but when she found none there was nothing left but to end the call.

"Bye, Sam and thank you again for your kindness."

Ann hung up still a little surprised by her behavior. The words had flown out of her mouth before she could stop them. Ann couldn't understand why, but she couldn't avoid it. There was something about Sam that affected her and she was curious to find out what it was.

Her interest piqued, Ann threw off the covers and started moving about Sam's modest but rather cozy apartment. Slowly, she perused the living room where an entertainment wall complete with a big screen TV and an extensive variety of DVDs caught her eye. She surveyed the collection, noticing that there were more action movies than anything in the collection. A stereo rack completed the scene with a small collection of CD's stacked to its side. By the styled looks of the artists emblazoned on their covers Ann knew the music held within spanned a length of the last several decades of Jazz. She carefully returned them to their place and turned to view the rest of the room. Next to one side of the couch was an odd assortment of law books and sports magazines tossed on an end table.

"So you like sports, jazz and action movies when you're not studying the law. Interesting..." Ann contemplated as she continued surveying her surroundings. On the couch, she found a sweatshirt with the NYPD symbol on it. Without a second thought, Ann reached for the shirt, pressed it firmly against her nose and inhaled. Instantaneously the intertwined scents of sandalwood and jasmine unleashed additional memories from the night before.

"Hell yeah, this is definitely stronger than coffee." Ann said lifting her glass and downing her drink in a single gulp. The liquid slid over her tongue and down her throat with ease until it hit her stomach. That's when the fire erupted in her, leaving a scorched trail behind it. Ann could feel her eyes opening wider and a rush of air being forced out of her lungs in an effort to cool the burning sensation that was overtaking the back of her throat.

"Whew! Just what I needed, something with a little more kick," Ann said a little more boisterously than she needed over the loud music. "How about another?" Ann uncorked the bottle of 'Jose Cuervo' Sam had ordered for them.

"You should take it easy," Sam cautioned. "Tequila is a very tricky drink."

"I think I can handle a few shots, detective."

Ann poured herself another drink then lifted her glass and downed it. The burn wasn't quite as bad this time, apparently knowing what to expect was half the battle. She set the shot glass down on the table.

"I'm not as fragile as I look."

"I'm pretty sure about that." Sam said locking their gazes.

Ann was immediately lost in a pool of blue until her attention was dispersed when she heard a sexy Spanish accent interrupting their moment.

"Can I get you anything else?"

A ball of anger knotted in Ann's chest when she noticed a hot waitress leaning over the table displaying her generous cleavage for Sam's appreciation in a shameless flirtation.

"We're good, thanks," Sam answered without taking her eyes off Ann.

The waitress nodded and left shooting a frustrated look at Ann.

"I think she was flirting with you," Ann's anger turned into teasing.

"Who?"

"The waitress."

"Was she?" Sam blinked. "I didn't notice."

"Why not? Isn't she your type?"

"No, it's not that." Sam gulped her drink and leaned back in her chair.

Ann lifted a curious eyebrow.

"I'm here with you and, although we are not a couple, I think the least I can do is devote my full attention to you."

"You definitely know how to make a woman feel special." Ann wrinkled her nose in a charming gesture.

"I have many skills." Sam winked.

Ann's heart skipped a beat. There was something about Sam, something that was making Ann fall hopelessly in love with her.

"Let's dance," Ann blurted out of nowhere.

"What?" Sam sat straight up.

"I want to find out if dancing is one of your many skills." Ann stood up and extended her hand as an invitation. "Are you coming or are you afraid I'll find out that you don't have so many skills after all?"

A rakish grin slowly spread across Sam's face. She latched onto Ann's hand and let the high-spirited woman lead her to the dance floor. Ann grinned proudly as she caught a few jealous glares being thrown at her, one in particular made Ann puff out her chest. The redhead woman that had hugged Sam earlier was shooting daggers at her. She sent a triumphant smile and clutched Sam's hand as they glided among the other couples reaching the back of the room. Sam stopped and slid her hand around Ann's waist. A larger grin covered Ann's face and she placed her palms against Sam's shoulders taking a step closer to her. The sudden closeness left both women uneasy as their bodies began swaying back and forth in the rhythm of the music. When Sam tightened her hold on Ann's waist the only thing left for Ann to do was to close her eyes and enjoy the closeness of their bodies.

Ann pressed the sweatshirt hard against her chest flinging the sleeves of it around her waist as if trying to relive the sensation of Sam's arms around her.

"What am I doing?" She whispered without letting go of her grip on the shirt.

You're falling in love that's what you're doing.

The realization hit Ann like a ton of bricks. She tossed the shirt back on the couch as if it was on fire.

"I've got to get out of here," Ann mumbled as she staggered off toward the bedroom, her only thought was to put time and space between her and the feeling that were closing in on her. She donned her clothes on as quickly as she could and left the apartment with the door slamming shut in her quake.

The walk through Central Park helped Ann's nerves to settle but all was for nothing when she entered her apartment. For the first time she felt lonely. The feeling of solitude almost overwhelmed her until blue eyes popped up in her mind. Hurriedly Ann closed her eyes and mentally pushed the image of Sam away. Once she thought it was safe, she held her breath and opened her eyes. To her surprise nothing gazed back at her. In fact, the only thing to catch her attention at all was the blinking light on her answering machine. Relieved and ready to keep her mind from drifting back to the source of her haunting, Ann crossed the living room and perched on the arm of her sofa. She stared at the blinking light that was beckoning her until she mustered up the courage to press the replay button.

The mechanical voice from the machine soon followed.

"You have four new messages. First message:"

"Hey, Ann, it's your mother. I hope you still remember that you have one. Listen sweetie, your father and I are a little bit worried about you, so as soon as you find some free time, please call us. Love you!"

"Second message:"

"Hi ya, Doc. Where the hell are you? I've been trying to call your cell phone since you left the hospital. I hope you're ok and don't do anything stupid, like getting back together with dull boy. If you have this itch, don't scratch it. Call me and we will get really drunk until it goes away. Seriously, Ann, you know my number so call me."

"Third message:" the mechanical voice signaled yet another.

"Hi baby, I know that you asked me not to call but I just wanted to see how you were doing. I miss you Ann, I really do. I don't know what I did or maybe I didn't do but...I really want to say I'm sorry. I'm sorry if I'd put a lot of pressure on you. I'm sorry if I made you believe that your needs are less important than mine. I'm sorry if I wasn't there when you needed me. But please, please give me a chance to prove to you that I love you more than anything-"

"Like I really needed to hear Joe declaring his love for me," Ann muttered struggling against her emotions.

"Fourth message:"

"Jesus, now who?" Ann muttered under her breath.

"It's me again."

The second Ann heard Joe's voice her stomach began to churn.

"I think I ran out of time. Anyway, I just wanted to say that you're my best friend and I miss you. I miss you like crazy. Please call me, anytime. I'll be glad just to hear your voice. I love you!"

Hearing those three words directed at her caused Ann's bile to rise into her throat. She swallowed fast to keep it from coming up any further.

"End of new messages."

The sound of the answering machine clicking off set a landslide of tears rolling down from Ann's eyes. She didn't even bother to try to stop them. She just let go of all the confusion, all of the emotions, and all of the turmoil from the past few weeks. Ann collapsed onto the couch and wept until she felt the heaviness slowly leaving her chest. When all of the anguish was finally gone, Ann pulled herself together and reached for the phone. She punched in the numbers from her memory and waited for the call to go through. It didn't take long.

"Hi...yeah, it's me...no, no everything is ok. I was just wondering if you'd like to meet me tomorrow morning. We need to talk."

Continued...

**Warrior Angel's Scrolls
Index Page**

**~ Badges and Needles ~
by Warrior Angel**

For disclaimers see Part 1

*Hey guys,
Loved the feedback, keep doing it!!!
Enjoy,
WA.*

Part 13

Sam watched the passing landscape from the passenger-side car window. She wasn't used to letting herself be blindly led anywhere, but when the person guiding her was Ann, Sam was willing to go through the gates of hell and enjoy it.

As the vehicle's speed slowed, Sam turned to watch Ann carefully pull the car to a stop. Without a single word, Ann got out and motioned for Sam to follow her. Silently Sam did just that until she found herself in the middle of a Japanese garden. Sam surveyed her surroundings and felt a sense of tranquility emanating from the aesthetic elements that had been placed there. She paused for a moment to close her eyes and allow her other senses to come to the forefront. The sound of moving water filled her with exceptional peace. That short moment of respite gave Sam the courage she needed to keep walking. Slowly, she pushed forward and joined Ann standing on a small bridge admiring a cascading waterfall that flowed into a clear pond.

"It's a peaceful place you have here."

Ann's shiver was barely noticeable but it obviously took her by surprise and forced her eyelids to flutter close in an effort to regroup.

Sam waited patiently spurred on by the tranquility of the surroundings.

"It's even more beautiful under the moon light," Ann answered without looking at Sam. "It pleases the spirit. Well, that is, my spirit."

Gathering all her courage, Ann lifted her eyes and met the penetrating blue gaze that was fixed on her, accelerating her heartbeat and breathing.

"This place is my secret hideaway. I come here when I need to think."

"And what are you thinking?" Sam asked in a sultry tone all the while keeping eye contact with Ann.

"I'm trying to understand what's happening to me," Ann confessed boldly despite the flurry of nervous activity in the pit of her stomach.

Both women regarded each other with slight uncertainty until Ann broke their gaze and turned her back to Sam as if trying to regain her ability to think clearly.

"I'm trying to understand why you make me feel the way I do."

"And how do I make you feel?" Sam's voice was an octave lower than her normal tone making the question sound even more sensual in nature than it was meant.

"Complete, safe...when I'm near you-" Ann spun fast and found herself face to face with Sam, so close that she could feel woman's breath on her face. "Tell me why it feels like I've known you for a lifetime when in fact, we've just met."

The urgency of Ann's plea made Sam's heart race faster.

"I wish I could." Sam half-whispered, tucking a stray hair behind Ann's ear. "The truth is that every time I'm near you, all I can think of is gathering you into my arms and kissing you with all my might."

Sam lowered her face until the warmth of her breath caressed Ann's lips. Time stood still as both women struggled to come to terms with what they knew was about to happen. Their hearts were pounding in their ears while passion emanated from their gazes.

Ann's hesitation melted quickly like an ice cube in the middle of hot August afternoon. She leaned forward and filled the gap that separated them allowing their lips to touch tentatively as a kiss ensued.

Neither could say from whom it came, but a single strangulated moan ignited the passion within them both. Sam threaded one hand in Ann's hair pulling her impossibly closer as her lips explored the softness of Ann's mouth. If that wasn't enough, the feeling of Ann's hand exploring her body caused Sam's insides to burn with desire. The sensations she was experiencing far exceeded what she'd been dreaming of for so long.

Ann's elongated, sensual groan elicited an instinctive reaction from Sam the moment she felt Ann slowly beginning to pull back. She held Ann firmly in her arms and recaptured her lower lip, pulling it into her mouth. Once there, Sam nibbled it sensually earning yet another moan as her reward. Finally, she relinquished her grip on Ann's hair and they parted breathless.

The sexual pull of Ann's libido was too much for her to ignore. Her nervous hesitation overcome, Ann took the initiative once more and upped the ante. On pure instinct she advanced closer until one pair of lips met the other. Staking her need for more, Ann's tongue sought entrance and it was granted. Quickly a duel for supremacy ensued leaving Ann as the winner. She lavished in the moment as all the desire that had been haunting her for the past few months came into being.

Overwhelmed and ablaze by the passion coursing through her, Sam felt a hunger surface and work its way down her body leaving her legs threatening to give away. The kiss ended but not their contact. Sam leaned against the hand rail and circled her arms around Ann's waist bringing her closer in the process. Ann slowly melded into Sam's chest struggling to catch her breath. Once settled, Sam rested her cheek on a bed of lavender scented hair.

Very aware of the adrenaline pumping through her veins, Ann enlaced her arms around Sam's waist, totally enjoying the fingertips caressing her back.

Both women lingered in the moment savoring the comfort of each other's body as they listened to a light breeze rustling through the leaves amid a bird's cherished song.

A loud clap of thunder silenced the birds and caught Sam and Ann off guard. They barely had time to find shelter on the porch of a tea house located a few feet away before the downpour of rain swept across the tranquil scene.

"That was close." Ann giggled like a teenager.

Still under the effects of their kiss, Sam felt her legs quivering and sat on the floor leaning her back against the wall. "Come here."

Indulging her craving for closeness, Ann accepted the invitation and curled up against Sam's shoulder. Ann's left hand got a life of its own and moved smoothly along Sam's thigh until their fingers intertwined.

"They fit perfectly," Ann reflected. She used her free hand to caress Sam's midsection. "Can I tell you something?"

Sam drew Ann's hand to her lips and kissed it. "You can tell me anything."

"I never told anyone about this place." Ann spoke softly. "It has always been my private space."

"Then, why did you bring me here?" Sam's gaze followed the raindrops hitting the pond.

"Because I trust you. I can't explain it but-"

Ann felt suddenly shy but a soft squeeze on her shoulder encouraged her to continue.

"It's like you complete this emptiness that I was never aware existed inside of me," Ann's admission was barely audible. She waited for Sam's reaction.

Sam couldn't speak. Her heart pounded so fast it took her breath away and made her head spin. When she regained control over her body, Sam tightened her hold on Ann and kissed her blonde head lovingly.

"I know what you mean." She pressed her lips against Ann's hair.

Ann shifted her position gently extracting herself from Sam's embrace. She locked their gaze and reached out to Sam's face.

Sam took the initiative this time meeting Ann's lips full on. Soon, Sam's tongue sought entrance while her hands slipped underneath Ann's sweater running along the length of her back, marveling at the softness of her skin.

Ann melted at the contact. A loud moan was the only response she could muster.

For the second time that very day they were in heaven. That is, until beeping sounds reached their ears and broke their moment.

"And that's how they were expelled from Paradise." Sam joked. She nipped and teased Ann's lips causing her to chuckle.

"I'm afraid that's reality calling." Ann retrieved her pager from its host. "It's an emergency from the hospital."

As if on cue, Sam felt her cell phone vibrating in her pocket. She retrieved it only to see Mark's I.D. number displayed.

"Yep, it's definitely reality calling." Sam stood up. "Sorry, but I've got to answer this."

"That's okay. I've got one of my own to answer." Ann stood up and walked a few steps away. She used her cell phone to answer the page.

"Hey Oscar, it's me... Yes, it's Dr. Thomas, alright. Did you page me? No? That's weird, I got a 911 message sent from that phone... No, I'm not... do you have any idea who did? Ok, I'll hold."

Ann waited patiently until she felt strong arms wrapping around her from behind. Her eyelids shut immediately and she melted under the gentle touch. A voice coming from the phone startled Ann, but her ability to focus was already lost.

"From Danni...uh...listen-

Butterfly kisses started being planted on her shoulder and neck. Closing her eyes again, Ann leaned against Sam molding their bodies together. Feeling her libido rising fast, Ann terminated the call abruptly.

"Never mind, tell her I'll be right there." Ann closed the flip and spun in Sam's arms.

"Where were we?"

"I think we were right about here." Sam's lips met Ann's.

The kiss didn't last any longer than it took for both their libidos to surge into full throttle. Ann and Sam both jerked her heads away knowing full well that they wouldn't have the time to go any further.

"I have to go to the hospital," Ann offered out of breath.

"And I," Sam sighed. "I have to go to the station."

Ann's pout was so priceless that Sam didn't resist kissing those lips one more time.

"Want me to drive?" Sam offered as she withdrew her lips from Ann's.

Ann lifted a questioning eyebrow. "Why?"

"Cause we both need to get back to the city quickly."

Ann's eyes narrowed. "Are you calling me a slow driver?"

"No. I'm just overconfident in my own driving skills," Sam teased. "You know, that is part of my job every day, driving around to crime scenes, checking out leads, tracking down the bad guys."

"Oh really? I would have thought they came in on their own accord."

Sam smirked. "If it were only that easy I'd be out of a job."

"Well, if you want to talk about jobs, mine is to keep everybody safe and alive. Besides, the car is mine and I'll be the one driving. So, suck it up." Ann stuck out her tongue.

Sam's eyes widened. "Is that an offer?"

"Only if you can catch me." Ann broke in a mad dash toward the car with Sam hot on her heels.

Ann didn't stop running until her hand was on the door handle. "You better hurry if you're going to ride back with me."

"Where did you learn to run like that?" Sam came sliding to a halt at the passenger door.

"You've got to be fast to work at the ER." Ann winked then quickly slid into the driver's seat.

"Is there anything else you're fast in?"

"You should see me eating." Ann clipped the ends of the seatbelt together while Sam slipped into the car.

Despite losing the battle, Sam sat contently on the passenger seat gazing over at Ann unable to fight a silly grin off her face.

"Something wrong?"

"No, just enjoying the view."

Ann grinned. Leaning sideways, she got her attention off the road long enough to reward Sam with a quick peck on the lips.

Releasing a serene sigh, Sam averted her eyes out the side window struggling to remember the last time she'd felt so comfortable around someone.

If I'm dreaming, please don't let me wake up...ever again.

Ann rushed through the ER front doors nearly crashing into her best friend.

"Danni, what's the emergency?" Ann searched the ER for any signs of abnormality.

Danni grabbed Ann's arm and pulled her to a more private corner. "Your mother's here."

"WHAT?"

Danni waved her hand to a couple of curious staff members that were attracted by Ann's outburst. "Keep moving. Nothing to see here,"

After making sure there were no more uninvited ears, Danni turned back to Ann. "As I was saying, your mom came down here earlier because she'd gone by your place and you weren't there." Danni reached inside her pocket retrieving a piece of paper. "She said she's at this hotel and 'demanded' you to call her when you had some time for your own mother."

"I can't deal with my mother right now." Ann felt her head beginning to ache and leaned against the wall.

"What is she doing here?"

"It's got to be something to do with Joe." Ann speculated.

"Don't tell me dull boy went crying to mommy and daddy."

"I don't doubt it." Ann ran a frustrated hand through her hair. "Shit."

"What's going on, Ann? And don't tell it's just about Joe." Danni pinned Ann in a challenging stare. "I know there's more to it."

"I met someone." Ann confessed softly.

"And..."

Ann shook her head. "It's complicated."

"Complicated, huh?" Danni's brow furrowed. "Married?"

"No"

"Kids?"

"No, nothing like that."

"Is he ugly?"

Ann smirked. "The most gorgeous person I've ever met."

Danni threw both of her hands up impatiently. "Then fast forward to the complicated part."

"I'm scared." Ann met Danni's gaze then quickly looked away. "I can't explain it, but when I'm with Sam I feel things that I've never felt before. My body and my heart react in a way-

"HELP!"

Strident demands echoed through the ER.

"Somebody's gotta do something."

"Yeah, somebody help."

Ann turned to see the attending on duty moving down the hallway toward a group of hysterical cheerleaders.

"Okay, please-" Doctor O'Neal tried to be heard through the commotion. "Okay, girls, please."

"Come on, don't just stand there." A babbling girl grabbed the doctor's coat. "You have to fix Melissa. She's our star, without her we're doomed. We'll never win the competition this weekend without her."

"Francis, let go of the doctor." A woman stepped between them. "Doctor, can you save the girl?"

"And you are?"

"I'm Mrs. Penfield, their coach."

"Alright Mrs. Penfield, what happened?"

"The girls were practicing an unauthorized pyramid when one of the base girls lost her balance and Melissa fell from the top. Can you help her?"

"We'll do our best. Right now I can't promise anything until I see her." O'Neal scanned past the group of girls searching for the victim but there wasn't one insight. He turned his gaze back to Mrs. Penfield. "And the injured girl would be exactly where?"

As if on cue the sliding doors opened and the paramedics wheeled a gurney inside.

"Sixteen year-old girl fell backwards from the top of a pyramid. She was dazed and confused on our arrival. Her respirations were labored and we noted signs of crepitus and pain in her bony pelvis. We've immobilized and taken full trauma precautions," the EMT informed.

"Let's take her into trauma one." O'Neal scanned the area until his gaze settled on the head nurse standing off to a corner. "Danni, I'm going to need your help."

"Damn it! We'll finish this later." Danni rushed toward the trauma room, shouting back to Ann. "If you ask me, I think Sam is the one."

The simple sentence sent Ann's mind into a complete loop.

"Yes, I think Sam is the one."

Continued...

**Warrior Angel's Scrolls
Index Page**

**~ Badges and Needles ~
by Warrior Angel**

For disclaimers see Part 1

*Hey guys,
Loved the feedback, keep doing it!!!
Enjoy,
WA.*

Part 14

Sam brought the telephone up to her ear. Yet again the dial tone blared just like every other time she had repeated the motion over the course of the last two days.

"Damn it!"

She slammed the phone back into its cradle and immediately reached for her cell phone. One look at the bars showing on its digital display told her the signal was good. Sam shoved the cell phone back into her pocket.

"So much for keeping my hopes high."

Sam hastily looked around the room in an attempt to hide her disgust. She'd put herself out there for the first time in years and now she was feeling left in a lurch. She leaned forward running both of her hands through her hair the whole time wondering if the kisses she had shared with Ann had meant anything at all to the other woman. The truth of the matter was those kisses had meant something to Sam and given her reputation that was a major accomplishment all of its own.

Call her you moron, the tiny voice inside her head egged her on.

"I can't. I won't. She's the one with boyfriend issues."

"Who are you talking to?"

The voice coming from outside her head startled Sam.

"Mark, what are you doing here?"

"Working or at least that's what I thought we were supposed to be doing."

Sam cleared her throat and looked nervously about her clothing.

"So, who were you talking to?"

"My buttons." Sam blurted out the first thing that came to her mind.

"God! And they say men are from Mars."

"Huh?" A look of confusion crossed Sam's face as she watched Mark walk toward her.

"Whatever."

"Yeah, whatever." She mimicked his aloofness casting one last glance to the phone on her desk. Out of the corner of her eye she could see him clear some space and sit on the corner of her desk.

"Is there something up, Mark?" She turned her full attention in his direction.

"Do you have any plans for tonight?"

Sam fought her natural impulse to look over to the phone.

"No."

"Excellent!" Mark nodded. "You and I are going to eat out tonight."

"Why? Is Allison back to the vegetarian phase again?"

"No! Thank God. No." Mark faked a shiver.

"Good. I'd hate to miss out dinner with you and your family."

"We'd still invite you."

"Yeah, but I'd have to refuse. Tofu turkey doesn't set well with a carnivore like me." Sam showed her teeth and chomped several times to make her point.

"Okay, T-Rex. I get the picture. You only put up with my family for the steaks."

"And a few other things," Sam said nonchalantly.

"Things?" Mark stared down at her and waited with bated breath.

Finally, Sam caved in. "Okay, I like the kids and Allison, too."

"That's good. Now that we've got that settled, how about we get back to the business at hand?"

"I'm all for business." Sam leaned back in her chair. She watched as Mark's expression turned serious. "I take it we're talking about Sgt. Miller."

"You got that right. What do we know about Sgt. Miller so far?"

Sam bit the inside of her cheek. "Brutal, dirty cop who took off before Internal Affairs nailed his ass."

"And?" Mark waited expectantly.

"Nothing. Zippo. Nada. The guy simply vanished from the face of the Earth."

"Ah, but he didn't vanish." Mark clicked his tongue. "All the records about him became classified. That's why we couldn't find anything at all."

"How do you know that?"

"I have my sources," Mark beamed.

"Right, the ex-girlfriend that works in the DA office." Sam chaffed. "I forgot about her."

"You'd better." He narrowed his gaze threateningly. "Anyway, the thing is, despite the fact of being technically unemployed for twelve years, it seems that Miller keeps a high-standard life style. Now, the real question is—"

"How can he afford it?"

"Exactly," Mark tapped his forehead and winked at her. "According to my sources, Miller dines once a month in a very elegant restaurant downtown." Mark kept his voice down. "I have a hunch that those dinners are somehow connected to the source of his money."

"He's been watched?" Sam lifted a very suspicious eyebrow.

"Well, you said it yourself. Internal Affairs was about to nail his ass. There's no way they would let the son of bitch slip through their fingers." Mark leaned closer. "I.A. has been keeping a diligent eye on Miller for quite some time now. Our case just crossed paths with theirs."

Sam narrowed her gaze sensing there was a catch to come. "I have a bad feeling about this..."

"Captain Bennett settled an agreement for cooperation."

"What? No way!"

"Shh!" Mark motioned for her to lower her voice.

"You know damn well that cooperation with I.A. means us telling them everything we know while they keep us in the dark about the most important facts of the investigation."

"Cooperation is better than them taking the case away from us. Besides we have to tell them everything we officially know about the case." He shot her a knowing look before straitening his body. "And officially, we don't know too much. Besides," Mark pointed first to himself and then to Sam. "We get a free dinner in a fancy restaurant."

"Fine, at least we'll get something out of working with them," Sam grunted not the least bit happy with this new turn of events.

"Great!" Mark slapped his thigh and stood up. "And like I said, it's a fancy restaurant, so that means we got dress up." He turned and looked directly at Sam. "That means emphasis on the word 'dress' for you."

"Not a chance." Sam snapped. "I've had my share of dressing up with high heels when I was undercover playing a hooker. Besides, my fishnet stockings have a hole in them from the last time you suckered me into doing that."

"Well, if you wouldn't have tackled the John after he waved that twenty in your face."

"Hey, I'm worth more than that."

Mark smiled taking in his partner's defiant stance. "Yeah, you're right. I'd have offered you at least twenty-five."

"Twenty-five? Is that all?"

"What can I say? I'm not turned on by fishnet."

"Is that so?" Sam raised an eyebrow in defiance.

"Yeah, that's so."

Sam scrutinized him for a long moment. "This isn't about fishnet stockings, is it?"

Mark raised a quirky eyebrow and frowned.

"I.A. thinks I'm too butch. That's it. They want to tone me down a bit so as not to attract attention."

"Well, it's not exactly the butch thing, but your outfits do usually scream detective from a mile away."

"Hey, I take care to hide my bulges." Sam puffed out her chest as she pulled the left side of her jacket away from the holstered gun tucked neatly against her ribcage.

"Maybe if you showed those bulges more," Mark shot a quick glance toward Sam's chest, "They wouldn't take you for the bad ass detective we know you are."

Sam stared in disbelief. "I can't believe you said that."

Mark cast his gaze to the floor.

"You don't think I can turn a man on?" The words were out of Sam's mouth before her brain registered what she was saying.

"I never said that," Mark stated knowing full well that he had just challenged her.

"Good. Cause if I.A. wants me to turn the heads of all the men in downtown New York, they've got it, Mark. Game on! Let's see how you hold you're own with that." Sam turned her head sending cascades of hair shimmering sideways as she accentuated the sway of her hips with her movement toward the door.

"Hey! Where are you going? It's only noon."

"I'm going to get ready. God knows by their standards I'll need all the help I can get."

Sam proceeded through the door and waited until it closed behind her before wondering aloud.

"Do I even remember how to walk in heels?"

She grimaced at her last memory of wearing them.

"Shit, me and my big mouth."

Breezing out of the elevator, Ann walked straight to the nurses' station where she was greeted by the gentle smile of an older nurse.

"Morning, Dr. Thomas."

"Hi Martha. Have you seen Danni?"

"She's in trauma two with Dr. Morgan."

"Thanks."

Ann turned and headed down the hall toward her destination. It wasn't long before the room came into her view. She stepped inside the trauma room and saw one of her attending physicians with his hands splayed over a blood soaked little girl's thorax doing chest compressions.

"What do we have here?"

"Ten year old girl hit by a truck." The expression on Danni's face was rather dire as she sent a knowing look at Ann.

"Massive internal bleeding," Morgan huffed out careful not to lose his rhythm. "She's in cardiac arrest."

Ann's face remained emotionless. "How long?"

"She's been down for forty-five minutes," Danni said in a monotone voice.

"All right Morgan, hold the compressions." Ann reached for a pair of gloves and donned them before feeling the girl's neck for any evidence of a pulse. "Any sign of a rhythm?"

"No, it's flat-line," Danni informed after studying the heart monitor for an adequate length of time.

"Alright," Ann grimaced. "Let's call-"

"Not yet," Dr. Morgan cut her off. "Keep bagging, Lily." Morgan mentioned for the respiratory therapist to continue ventilating the girl.

"Morgan," Ann softened her voice. "She's been down for too long."

Morgan resumed doing compressions. "I know. Just give me five more minutes."

"There isn't a detectable pulse." Ann gently held open the girl's eyelids and examined them carefully. "No corneal reflex. Her pupils are fixed and dilated. There's no reason to keep torturing this girl." The authority in Ann's voice remained but her tone softened once more. "Morgan, call it."

All eyes turned to Morgan as the words slowly crept into his world. Closing his eyes in resignation to his chief's will, he snapped off his gloves then stepped down from the riser and backed away.

"Time of death," Morgan glanced over the oversized clock on the wall and proceeded to complete the task. "Twelve-oh-four"

The slump of his shoulders was evidence enough of the effect the girl's death was taking on him.

"Do you want me to talk to the family?" Ann offered sympathetically.

"No, she was my patient. I'll do it." Morgan tore his surgical gown from his body and walked away.

Ann stared silently as the young doctor and the respiratory therapist made their way out of the room.

"He's going to be ok."

"I know, Danni. No matter how long you've worked in a hospital, from time to time something stupid like a child being hit by a truck gets to you."

"What about you?" Danni's voice softened. "How are you doing?"

"Me?" Ann snorted. "I'm the Chief. I've seen enough to know when I can't do any good."

"I meant you, personally." Danni studied Ann. "Not so good, huh?"

"You can tell?" Ann cast a disparaging gaze over her shoulder.

"I can always tell."

"Yeah you can."

"Let me guess, it's your mom?"

"Yes. I'm going to have dinner with her tonight."

"That's not so bad. You'll at least get a meal out of it."

The dire stare that met Danni's light-hearted approach nipped it in the bud. "But the real question is: will I be able to stomach it?"

Danni grabbed Ann's arm. "Come on, I'll buy you some coffee. God knows that commercial machine swill will kill any butterflies that nervous stomach of yours could possible spawn"

"Hardy-har-har." Ann mocked as they made their way toward the ER lounge. "I'm not breeding butterflies in my stomach, not even if I wanted to. The poor things would die from starvation given my hectic schedule."

"Seriously, Ann. Why are you so tensed about meeting your mother? Are you going to tell her you're giving dull boy the boot? Or is it about Sam? "

The mention of Sam's name sent a bolt of adrenaline through Ann's system and brought to mind the same feeling she'd had with each of Sam's kisses or the touch of her fingertips as they caressed her skin.

"I don't know." Ann shook her head then stopped abruptly when she realized that she did know but she couldn't bring herself to come to terms with it. "Maybe." From deep within her soul the reality of the situation screamed out from her inner consciousness. *And you haven't even called her, you chicken!*

"What's the problem with him anyway?"

Ann awakened from her thoughts. "Him who, Joe?"

Danni shot a curious look at Ann before slipping her coins into the coffee machine. "I was talking about Sam."

"Oh, that who." Ann averted her gaze. "There's nothing wrong with...Sam."

"Then what's the matter?"

"Well, you know how my mother likes to control my life as if I'm still a little girl." Ann sighed frustrated. "Damn it. I'm a grown woman. I'm the head of the busiest Emergency Department in this country and yet I'm afraid to be scolded because I no longer want to marry the man she thinks so highly of." Ann's shoulders slouched momentarily until the illusion of blue eyes staring into hers took the edge off of her tone. "Not to mention that I don't have the guts to tell her that I've fallen in love with someone else, and that this someone turns me head over heels with a simple glance and takes my breath away with every kiss. Dare I even tell her that Sam's caress turns my legs to..." Ann looked up to see a bemused look on Danni's face. "What?"

"Sam does all that?"

Ann didn't hesitate to answer. "Yes."

Danni was dumbfounded. "Man I can't wait to shake his hand."

Continued...

~ Badges and Needles ~

by Warrior Angel

For disclaimers see Part 1

Part 15

A long, low wolf's whistle split the air, gaining Sam's attention as she slowly emerged from the taxi. She quickly scanned the people congregating around the entrance of the restaurant. That's when Mark stepped forward to reveal the origin of her flattery.

"Partner, when you dress up-" He offered her his arm gallantly. "You get almost taller than me."

"Which is not very difficult, especially after you let all the air out of you," Sam smirked before turning to give him a 360 degree view of her. "So what do you think? I left the fishnets at home. I hope you're not disappointed."

He took in Sam's elegant, scarlet, sexy evening dress with a deep v-neckline and a low open back that highlighted her curvy body. A stiletto style heel completed her sexy look. "You look stunning."

"Thanks, and judging by the looks on the cab driver, the doorman of my building, and those three guys over there..." She discreetly nodded to a group of boys staring at her. "I'd say I still know how to make a man drool." Sam smiled triumphantly. "But hey, you don't look so bad yourself." She returned the compliment smoothing down the lapel of his stylish, charcoal, three button suit.

"I know." He puffed out his chest proudly and entered the restaurant looking for a strategic table where they could have a clear view of all the other diners.

"Okay, so when Miller walks in, we find a way to catch him on tape." Mark reviewed the plan.

"Don't worry. I'll handle that." Sam took her cell phone out of her purse and tested it on Mark. "When he arrives I'll walk to the restrooms and tape him with my ultimate cell phone camera. Say hi, Lieutenant."

Mark crossed his eyes before Sam put the phone away. "Any guesses on who the mystery bankroll is?"

"I don't know, but if I had to-" Sam's ability to speak was interrupted when all the blood from her body seemed to be drained by the sight of Ann entering the restaurant.

You have got to be kidding me!

Sam took several short breaths in order to regain control over her emotions.

Mark turned to a familiar blonde figure elegantly dressed in a black halter dress with her hair tied up in a ponytail style. "Wow. She's gorgeous, buddy!"

"How many fucking restaurants are there in this city anyway?" Sam muttered under her breath.

"What?" Mark's expression turned to one of bewilderment when he saw Sam looking up toward heaven and arguing with God.

"Is this some kind of sick joke of yours?" Sam exhaled angrily before noticing Mark looking at her like she had grown a second head.

"Don't ask." She hissed watching Ann as she approached two people seated at a table. The woman was a mature version of Ann while the other Sam recognized immediately when he stood up to greet her angel.

"Is that Batman?" Mark whispered.

Sam swallowed back the bile that had traveled up to her mouth. "Yeah, that would be Batman."

Before she could reach her boiling point Sam averted her gaze. That's when she spied Miller coming from the back entrance and immediately switched into her professional mode.

"Our guy is here."

Mark turned just enough to see Miller joining a gray-haired, well dressed, wealthy looking man. "Who's that?"

Sam quickly took hold of Mark's chin with one of her fingers and turned his attention back to her.

"That's what we're here to find out. Now act like you're my date and you only have eyes for me." Acting coy on the outside, Sam struggled to push away her emotional turmoil and focused on her job. She quickly retrieved her phone and flipped it open. "The guys in I.A. will be drooling over this footage." Sam winked at Mark and blew him a make-believe kiss. "I'll see you in a few, Tiger."

Seeing this sexy, playful side of Sam caught Mark off guard and he did the only thing that came to his mind. He growled.

Ann felt sick in her stomach. She had to fight hard not to throw up in the middle of the restaurant when she spotted her mother chatting animatedly with Joe.

I can't believe she's done that. Her mind was struggling not to let her body shake with anger.
Scratch that. I can't believe he has done that.

The closer Ann got to the table the whiter her knuckles became. She had been preparing herself for a confrontation with her mother but she got a set up with Joe instead.

"Hi baby." Joe stood up and waved off the waiter making a show of pulling the chair out for her.
"You look fantastic."

"What is he doing here, mother?" Ann completely ignored the man holding the chair and directed her gaze toward her mother.

"Well, hello to you too darling." Helena Thomas flashed her sarcastic trademark grin.

"Don't start with me, mother." Ann was about to lose her temper. "I thought this was a mother and daughter catch up dinner."

"Ann, I don't mean to impose." Joe interrupted the glare war that was going on in front of him. "I talked to your mother and frankly I thought you knew I'd be joining you."

"Oh no, mom neglected to tell me that small detail." Ann took her seat and narrowed accusative eyes at her mother. "Didn't you?"

"A small oversight, my dear, what can I say? It simply slipped my mind."

"Do you want me to leave?" Joe started to stand up but Helena's hand kept him in place.

"Nonsense." Helena sent a sharp look at her daughter. "We're all well-educated and civilized people here. We can have a perfectly polite conversation now, can't we?"

"Of course we can." Ann released a long calming breath, relaxing visibly. "I'm sorry, Joe. I didn't mean to be rude. I apologize."

"That's more like it." Helena relaxed as well. "Now let's order something to drink and you can start explaining what is going on between the two of you."

"There's nothing to explain." Ann declared shortly. "Joe and I decided that we needed a break from each other."

"I don't understand Ann. You two were just fine a couple of months ago. What happened?" Helena alternated her look between the couple.

"Don't ask me. She's the one who's been acting crazy." Joe pointed to Ann.

"Crazy?" Ann snapped defensively.

"Yeah, I don't know what's going on with you, Ann. You don't talk to me anymore. I even have the feeling that you've been avoiding me for a while now." Joe shook his head impatiently. "And every time I ask you what's wrong, you just say 'nothing'. I don't know what else to do." He softened his tone as he placed his hand on Ann's. "I just know that I'm crazy about you and I'd do anything for us to go back to the way we were."

Ann closed her eyes feeling the stinging of the tears. There was such honesty in Joe's words that made her heart ache. She felt him squeeze her hand and opened her eyes to meet his, but instead her vision was drawn to a red dressed figure walking by her table. Ann looked up and felt an adrenaline shot course through her system as her eyes met familiar blue ones. As it seems to happen every time Ann's eyes met Sam's, time frozen. She became fully aware of her mouth getting dry and her heart thundering in her ears. The spell was broken when Ann followed Sam's gaze traveling to her hand that was being held by Joe. In an instant, Ann yanked her hand away startling Joe and raising her mother's curiosity.

Helena turned to see nothing more than a beautiful woman talking on her cell phone.

"What is wrong, Ann?" Helena's tone showed genuine concern.

"Sweetie, are you ok?" Joe tried to reach for her hand again but Ann stood up so fast that she nearly knocked the chair over behind her.

"I have to..." Suddenly, Ann was out of her element. Her legs were threatening to give away. She needed to get out of there fast. "I have to go." Before anyone could say anything Ann darted out of the room.

A barely audible click and the filming started. Sam got close enough to Miller's table in order to get a clear shot of the mysterious man. Unfortunately, her current position also provided a clear view of Ann's table which divided her attention between her target and the woman whose eyes lifted to meet hers. As it always seemed to happen, Sam's mind went blank and she lost all ability to focus until her gaze fell upon Ann's hand firmly encompassed by Joe's. Instantaneously, all the blood in her body boiled and her face hardened. Then without warning she was filled with nothing but puzzlement as she watched Ann's hand jerk free of its confinement. Ann's quick reaction had sent a wave of beleaguered interest not only to Sam but also to the older woman that sat at table. The woman had simply turned and followed Ann's gaze in Sam's direction.

Like a deer caught in the headlights, Sam froze forgetting her real reason for being at the restaurant. When confronted with the sight of Ann fleeing from the table, Sam had to fight the urge to run after her. She, however, coached herself to stick with the plan and filmed Miller's table a few seconds more. Only after being fully convinced that she had enough material to identify the mystery man, Sam looked at Mark and received an encouraged nod from her partner. She then turned to see a glimpse of Ann's back as she passed through the exit.

Sam was off without hesitation as her quick strides carried her through the same doorway. Once outside, she scanned the area until spotting Ann leaning against a parked car.

"Are you alright?" Sam asked approaching the distressed looking woman.

"No, I'm not alright." Ann shook her head without looking at Sam. "I'm far from being alright." Ann pushed herself away from the car and stood face to face with Sam. "I'm sitting there listening to the man who's been my boyfriend for the past five years telling me how much he loves me and the only thing that I can think of is that in five years he hasn't made me feel half the way I feel when I'm with you." The tears that had been threatening to spill started rolling down Ann's cheeks. "And then, as if the fates had some twisted sense of humor, you show up looking absolutely gorgeous and send me into this parallel universe where I have no control over my emotions. So please, please tell me what to do?"

"I can't." Sam's voice was choked with emotion. "I can't go down that road again."

"What?" Ann stared into Sam's eyes.

"I've seen it before." Sam kept their gaze fixed emanating genuine sorrow. "When a straight girl with a boyfriend in tow decides to experiment in a lesbian affair, it's the third wheel that ends up with a broken heart."

"Sam-" Ann started but was cut by Sam's raised hand.

"I'm sorry if I've hurt you but we're done." Sam slipped her stoic mask on. "It's best for all of us."

Both women regarded each other in agonizing silence for a few seconds.

Fighting every need that screamed for her to gather Ann in her arms and never let go, Sam turned to leave. "See you around, doc."

Ann stood motionlessly watching Sam walk away as her world continued to crumble around her.

Mark stopped mid-bite to acknowledge a very agitated Sam marching back into the restaurant.

"Is everything alright?"

"Just peachy," she offered through clenched teeth.

"Did you two work things out?" He asked tentatively.

"Yep..." Sam downed her wine in a single gulp. "I never want to see her again."

Mark's brow furrowed. "Are you-?"

"Sure?" She cut him off. "Yeah, I'm positive. Now, can you ask for the check so we can get out of this place, please?"

"But I just ordered crab cakes for the both of us," Mark practically whined.

"I hear doggie bags are very fashionable these days. Ask the waiter to wrap them up."

"Oh, come on Sam," Mark argued. "I thought we were going to have some fun on the I.A. tab tonight."

"Sorry, I seem to have lost my appetite."

Sensing his partner's sour mood, Mark decided to pry. "What happened out there?"

"Reality snapped back." She reached for the bottle of wine and refilled her glass.

"Want to talk about it?"

"No." Sam stared at the wine she was swirling in her glass. She stopped the motion to let it settle then raised the glass to her lips. The aromatic fragrance of the wine was lost to her senses as the liquid rolled quickly over her tongue. She swallowed hard before releasing a long breath. Sam slid her cell phone over toward Mark. "Here, check out the footage."

Mark clicked the video on and watched the scene Sam had taped a few minutes earlier. "That's good material, Sam. I think I.A. will flip over this."

"They'd better. Mark, I'd really like to go home." Sam's shoulders slumped.

Mark noticed this and signaled for the waiter without further argument. "Fine, I'll settle the bill and we are out of here...as soon as they bring us out doggie bags."

To anyone else, Mark and Sam leaving the restaurant would mean nothing but a normal couple who had just finished their meal. To Ann though, the scene felt like a hard blow on her stomach.

"God, she takes my breath away." It came as a soft low whisper.

Hiding among the shadows, Ann observed Mark walk up to the valet and retrieve the car keys. An overwhelming feeling enveloped her when Sam turned and scanned the area. Inwardly, Ann knew that gesture was meant to find her. In an effort to respond, Ann started to step forward only to see Sam disappear inside the car. Within seconds the engine was revved and the vehicle pulled out into traffic. Helplessly, Ann's gaze followed the car until they turned the corner and drove out of sight.

With nothing further to hold her attention, Ann slowly looked up into the clear night sky.

"She's gone."

No sooner were the words out of Ann's mouth than a shiver ran down her spine. Placing one foot in front of the other, she started walking not really caring where her legs were taking her as she tried to figure out the course of recent events.

"I have to let it go...let her go."

Why?

"She asked me to."

She never said that.

"It's my fault anyway. I should've called her."

So, what now?

"Nothing, I guess. She said we're done. Maybe it's for the best."

Bullshit!

Biting the inside of her cheek in a nervous gesture, Ann pondered her options.

"Maybe it isn't for the best."

Ann's turmoil intensified when she realized where she was. Unconsciously her feet had guided her to where her heart wanted her to be, standing in front of Sam's apartment building.

"Now what?" Ann whispered as reverently as any pray. She waited with baited breath until her inner voice answered.

Go talk to her.

Never one to run from a fight, Ann took a deep breath and walked inside.

Determined, Ann brushed past the doorman and made a beeline to the elevator letting it carry her all the way up to Sam's door.

Ann took in a settling breath then knocked gently.

"Who is it?"

The muffled question came faster than Ann had anticipated and it startled her.

"It's...it's Ann. Could you please open the door?"

Ann's hands and legs were shaking so hard that she was amazed she could still be standing. The door in front of her was yanked open revealing a gorgeous but confused looking Sam.

"What the hell are you doing here? I thought I told you I was done."

"We're not done." Ann stated as she stepped inside unceremoniously blocking any attempt of Sam's to shut the door in her face. "Not done by a long shot."

Sam stood motionlessly by the door watching Ann marching purposefully into her living room.

"You have no right to say 'we're done' and just walk away." Ann paced the length of the room, then stopped and abruptly turned, leveling a determined gaze in Sam's direction. "This is not just about you, Sam. It's about me too."

Sam closed the door. "What do you want from me, Ann?"

"What?"

"You heard me." Sam ventured into the room, then leaned against the back of the couch and crossed her arms defiantly. "What is it that you want from me? Do you want me to be your sex buddy? Or maybe help you satisfy some sort of fantasy? Although I must admit a three-some in a straight sort of way has never really been up there on my list of things I wanted to do before I die."

"What?"

"Exactly," Sam sneered. "What is it that you want from me because I sure as hell don't know. Tell me, will you, so we can get this over with and I can go back to my world while you run back to the safety of 'Straight-Ville'."

The words stung like a slap. Ann studied Sam's face intently wondering where all the bitterness had come from. In a blink of the eye, the answer was on the tip of her tongue. "You were seriously hurt before..."

The change in Sam's expression told Ann that she had finally found a crack in the woman's defenses.

"Weren't you?"

"I gave my heart to someone who was just 'going through a phase'," Sam admitted. "Yes, I was hurt and I'm not about to repeat the same mistake twice."

"It's not fair." Ann whispered.

"What's not fair?" Sam fought the urge to catch a lonely tear that rolled down Ann's face.

"You're punishing me for someone else's mistake."

"I'm not punishing you-"

"Right, you're not." Ann took a step forward approaching Sam. "You're just running from something so powerful that it almost killed you in order to bring us together. After all if it wasn't for that bullet, I may never have met you."

Both women went silent mulling over last few months events.

"And now, you're everywhere I turn," Ann continued. "You're a part of every waking thought I have."

"And so are you." Sam admitted in a whisper centering her gaze on Ann.

This simple acknowledgement coaxed Ann's lips into a subtle smile. Their eyes met and held, both too scared to say what their souls knew to be the truth.

"I thought I knew what love was all about until I met you, Sam. Now, I'm not so sure I knew love at all before your kiss."

Startled by Ann's revelation, Sam faltered. "I...I don't know what to say."

"Say what's in your heart. We'll never know if we don't give it a try."

"You mean experiment," hurt tinged Sam's voice.

"I wouldn't call coming home again an experiment," Ann countered. "Because that's what I feel like when you're near me. I can't explain it. Hell, I don't even want to try. All I know is that you've touched my heart in such a way that no one ever could."

"And if it doesn't work, I stand the chance of being hurt all over again." Sam turned away and muttered under her breath.

"But if we don't try, we'll both ache for something that might have been."

Ann closed the distance between them until she stood next to Sam. The acknowledging glance she received from Sam fueled her determination. "We'll ache for something that should have been. I say we let the Fates' decide. They brought us here after all."

Sam took in a breath and looked away. "I don't know if I can."

"Everything is a little scary if you venture into by yourself." Ann reached out and caressed Sam's cheek. "Honestly, I'm not trying to hurt you. God knows I'm scared as all hell myself. I've never even considered falling in love with a woman before."

Sam looked puzzled. "Falling in love?"

"Hmm... And I thought I was the clueless one here," Ann smirked. "You mean to tell me that your detective instincts are on the fritz?"

"No!" Sam shot back rather indignantly. "Never."

"Good," Ann fired back startling Sam. "And before you can change the subject, yes, I do think I am falling in love with you, but we won't know that for sure if we keep standing in the way of fate, now will we?"

Sam silently appraised the woman before her.

"I'll be there with you every step of the way," Ann said in a soothing tone as her hand gently slipped into Sam's. "We can take it in baby steps if you want to."

"Or we could just go all out, balls to the wall," Sam raised an eyebrow, her defenses obviously whittled away.

The tentative expression on Ann's face turned to one of adulation and utter surprise. It was simply too precious to go unrewarded. Sam reeled the woman into her arms and drew Ann's undivided attention into a smoldering kiss.

Dazed by the whirlwind reversal, Ann groped for some sense of balance.

"What was that for?"

"I wanted the Fates to know where my intentions lie."

"Then I'm going to put my two cents worth into the mix, too."

Ann returned the kiss with a gentler and definitely more seductive one of her own. The tender expression of a more intimate proposal brought other parts of her body to life with a vigor the likes of which she'd never known. Ann's body screamed for more as the wetness between her legs escalated like a flash flood raging down a valley. Surely the Fates were calling out to her, to them both sensing Sam's heart pounding so closely next to her chest. It wasn't long before Ann realized that her own heart was beating in time with Sam's rhythm. Save for the touch of their mouths as lips melded, they were one. Suddenly, kisses weren't enough to appease the sense of need that was growing by leaps and bounds in them both. Ann fought with all she had to muster, whether for her senses or for her glory in what she deemed a fight to the finish. When warring tongues alone could sustain them no more, Ann pushed back out of breath and decreed her foothold on their future.

"Bed...now!"

Continued...

**Warrior Angel's Scrolls
Index Page**

**~ Badges and Needles ~
by Warrior Angel**

For disclaimers see Part 1

Hey guys,

Thanks for the feedback. Keep doing it!

Enjoy,

WA

Part 16

Fluttering eyelids heralded Ann's way into consciousness. She slowly stretched and welcomed a new day filled with hopes and promises. Ann shifted under the covers thoroughly enjoying the coolness of satin sheets as she turned to hug her pillow. The all too familiar scent of sandalwood-jasmine stimulated her senses and caused an ever increasing grin to come to her face. A sultry purr rumbled deep in her throat as a familiar image came to her mind.

Sam.

Flashbacks from the previous night aroused her libido. She released a heavy sigh of contentment as she squirmed under the memory of Sam's lusty blue eyes devouring her unceremoniously. Over and over again Ann replayed the sensation of Sam's body pressed hard against hers while those lips paid tribute to every inch of her burning skin.

The new degrees of pleasure and satisfaction that Ann had experienced awoken something inside of her and there was only one person to be blamed for it: Sam.

Ann felt like a new person. Their tryst hadn't been about sex or arousal. It was something deeper and stronger. It was something so amazing that she couldn't find any words to describe it. In a

way, it had felt like coming home after a very long trip. Sam was where she was meant to be and the Fates had proven themselves right.

Ann stretched and yawned like a Siamese cat in its most contented manner as she groped sideways to find the missing piece of her puzzle. However, the contented purr that started deep in her chest fell silent about the time she found an empty bed beside her.

"No, it wasn't a dream." Ann closed her eyes and lingered in the overwhelming memories. "It couldn't have been just a dream. I can still feel her inside..."

Fighting off a wave of disappointment, Ann peered about the room, but there was no sign of Sam. Relief washed over her when she recognized the furniture placed around the room.

Déjà Vu all over again! She smiled as her mind replayed the first time she'd been in this same room experiencing a mighty hangover after their Tequila fest.

Ann remembered how scared she got that day after realizing she was falling for Sam and chuckled. Climbing out of bed, Ann donned the first thing she found, an oversized Knicks shirt, and tiptoed into the living room where she first caught sight of Sam standing behind the kitchen counter.

Struck with awe at the extremely fit body veiled under the thin material of a sleeveless white T-shirt, Ann leaned against the wall as she continued to admire her most recent lover.

Damn, she looks even better in the morning light.

Ann felt her excitement building with memories of Sam kissing a trail down her stomach and making her tremble with arousal. Sam had been in total control of her body fulfilling every need that Ann had or ever dreamed of. In fact, the woman she'd been fantasizing about for so long had proved to be much better than any dream Ann had ever had.

Unable to quell the urge of her rising libido, Ann pushed off the wall, deciding to make her presence known as she closed the gap between her and Sam.

"That looks delicious." Ann's carnal thought was out before she knew it in a rather sexy, hoarse voice. "And the food looks good, too."

Sam's head snapped up in surprise. "Oh, no you don't. You're not going to spoil my surprise." Sam pointed in the direction of the bedroom. "So, go back to bed."

"Wow, breakfast in bed..." Ann wasn't even a little intimidated by Sam's threatening look. She leaned against the kitchen counter and stole a grape from the plate, making a show of biting it. "I wonder if you do that for every woman you sleep with."

Sam's eyebrow arched. "Nope, I never stay that long."

Ann furrowed her brows. "Don't you mean 'they never stay'?"

"Nope, it's me that never stays." Sam stated as Ann continued to look at her curiously. "I rarely bring anybody here."

Realizing the meaning of Sam's words, Ann circled the counter and stood face to face with Sam. "Does that mean that I'm..." She slid her hand under Sam's shirt evoking a sexy groan, "Special?"

"Do you have to ask?" Sam leaned and capture Ann's earlobe lightly between her teeth.

Ann squirmed under Sam's ministrations. "So, to be special..."

"Very special," Sam whispered into her ear.

"Hmm..." Ann purred with delight. "Very special, I must have done something right, huh?"

"Well, for starters..." Sam pulled back and looked at Ann trying to keep a straight face. "You made me agree with you a lot last night."

Ann pondered the statement with a puzzled look on her face.

"Oh, come on. Tell me you don't remember." Sam stopped short and threw her head back as a lusty, erotic panting began to reverberate throughout the room. After a few seconds it was punctuated by a somewhat raw but very sexy voice. "Yes....yes...that's it...yes!"

"Oh God!" Ann blushed and pressed her head against Sam's chest feeling it shake with laugh.

"No, no...you don't get to be embarrassed miss 'knocking boldly at my door in the middle of the night'." Sam teased mercilessly. "You came here with one thing on your mind and that was to seduce me."

Ann's head snapped up indignantly. "I did not."

"You did so. But who's complaining?" Sam captured Ann's lips and let her kiss further her statement all in the while backing Ann up onto the nearest wall. "I'm surely not." Sam then slipped her hand under the shirt Ann was wearing and found a breast ripe for the taking.

Driven by the passion of Sam's intimate touch, Ann wrapped her right leg around Sam's waist and melded their bodies together. The moan that slipped through Sam's lips sent a thrill of urgency down Ann's spine as she felt a trail of kisses descending her neck until Sam's mouth ravished her pulse point.

"You taste so good." Sam added before sucking in the soft flesh of Ann's neck.

Ann parted her lips and enjoyed the attention. The involuntary rocking of Sam's hips against Ann's pelvis grew with each passing moment intensifying Ann's need for Sam to claim her. Instead, Ann felt Sam allowing the suction to diminish as she laved southward.

The direct assault to Ann's senses was overpowering. She could feel her legs quiver and sensed the need to either lie down or fall down. In a rapid motion, Ann stripped her shirt off and tossed it over Sam's shoulder right before she moved her lover toward the couch where they landed in an entwined heap still clinging to the ever escalating mood. That was, until the familiar sound of beeping from Ann's pager split the air and cried out for her attention.

"That's...that's my pager." Ann managed breathlessly.

"I thought you were off today."

Ann giggled with relief. "I am."

"Then ignore it and pay more attention to me."

"Oh, yeah." Ann pulled her lover in for another kiss.

"Now, that's better." Sam said as she continued along with her loving ministrations until an insistent sound coveted their attention.

"And that's my cell phone." Sam mumbled around a fleshy bite of skin.

Sam tore her mouth away from Ann's collarbone and locked their gaze. The moment Ann looked into penetrating blue eyes she saw all her lust mirrored there. Unable to restrain herself, Ann captured Sam's mouth hungrily but the passion didn't last long with the addition of a third noise maker going off.

Ann backed away in an attempt to clear her mind. "That's your telephone, Sam. What else is going to go off next?"

A throaty laugh rumbled from deep within Sam's chest. "At the rate we're heating things up I'd say it will be the fire alarm." Sam took the element of surprise and used it to her best advantage. She latched onto a pert nipple and lavished her tongue over it.

"Bring it on 'cause I'm wet already," Ann murmured, enjoying the attention.

"Your wish is my command."

Sam slid one hand down Ann's midsection and over her hips where she was welcomed by skin softer than silk. Languishing in the tactile pleasure of the moment, Ann allowed Sam to linger there until the sound of Sam's department pager added to the earsplitting ruckus of the other telecommunication devices that were going off.

"Shit, shit, shit!" Sam released Ann and rolled off her before scrubbing her face angrily.

"Do you think somebody's trying to interrupt us?"

"All I can say is that it better be damn important," Sam growled as she reached out and retrieved her phone.

Ann rose and located her purse under a pile of discarded clothes on the end of the couch. She hastily withdrew her pager and reviewed the messages, ten to be exact and all with the designated hospital code of 911 and the ER number following it. Ann retrieved her cell phone and saw Danni's name flashing on the display. She connected the call and brought the phone up to her ear.

"Danni?"

"Ann, where are you?" Danni's voice sounded more than just agitated as she screamed over the commotion in the background sound. "We've been trying to reach you all morning."

"I do have a life, you know. I'm not on call today--"

"Haven't you seen the news?"

"No."

"Well then I suggest you turn the damn TV on."

Spinning around Ann saw Sam standing motionlessly in front of the TV set holding the remote control with a shaky hand, the telephone firmly pressed on her left ear with the other. Ann focused on the startling images displayed across the TV screen.

The first thing to call her attention was the somberness on the anchor's features. She then focused on the images displayed at his right side. There she could see several cars engulfed in roiling flames. Paying closer attention as one scene changed into another, Ann noticed convoys of vehicles from all the emergency services off in the distance. Next flashed across the screen helicopters flying overhead with lights cutting through the vast palls of smoke billowing up from piles of what appeared to be concrete, metal, and glass.

Her mouth dropped open as the words of the breaking news anchor added his commentary.

"If you are just joining us, we want to advise you that we are providing you with live coverage of the aftermath of a huge explosion in downtown New York City this morning. Police have yet to release the official number of people injured, but so far we have no reports of any fatalities. City hospitals confirm that the flood of casualties has caused a strain on their systems and they are sending out a desperate plea for all off-duty medical staff to report in. Sources at the Fire Department are speculating that a gas leak may have been the source of the explosion but with the magnitude of the blast and destruction of nearly an entire city block, the FBI has been called

in to rule out any terrorist involvement. We'll keep you posted with more of our live coverage right after this break."

"Jesus Christ," Ann whispered astonished.

"It's more like hell running loose over here." Danni pressed urgently, "So when can we expect you?"

The sound of a deep intake of breath diverted Ann's attention from the TV set to her ashen-looking lover.

"Sam, what's wrong?"

"Sam???" Danni's voice squealed across the line. "Now I know why you haven't been answering your pager."

"Listen Danni," Ann's gaze never wavered from Sam. "I'll be there as soon as I can." She hung up hurriedly and stepped closer to Sam waiting for her conversation to end.

"No mother, don't come here...Yes I'll find him. You stay put and I'll find Leo, I promise...Don't worry. I'll call you as soon as I know something...Of course not, mom. Leo knows better than to go dying in some stupid explosion. I'll call you." Sam ended the call abruptly then quickly set her fingers in motion punching in the next set of numbers. "Come on, answer it."

Ann edged closer watching a very impatient Sam.

"Damn it! It's on voice mail."

"Are you okay?"

Sam tossed the phone on the couch before acknowledging Ann's presence. "My brother owns an art gallery in that area. We can't get a hold of him."

Sensing that Sam was struggling not to break down, Ann reached for her trying to offer some comfort. Instantaneously, Sam accepted the invitation and melted into Ann's arms.

"I have to find him." She whispered against Ann's shoulders. "Ann, I'm sorry. I didn't want the morning to end like this but I have to go down there."

"I know, love. I only wish I could go with you but I have to go to the hospital-"

Sam jerked back startling Ann. "You don't think. Oh god! What if he's-"

"Sam, take it easy." Ann forced eye contact. "Listen to me. You need to calm down, ok?" Her soothing tone seemed to have an effect on Sam. "You go to the blast scene and let me go to the hospital. If your brother is there I'll let you know. His name is Leo, right?"

"Yes." Sam exhaled a long calming breath. "Leo Matthews. I must have a picture of him somewhere." Sam started to get fretful but Ann held her firmly.

"Sam..." Ann locked their gazes again. "Describe him to me." She asked softly and sensed Sam relaxing.

"Late thirties, about six feet tall, dark hair, blue eyes-"

"So in other words, he's a male version of you?" Ann furrowed her brows.

Sam nodded. "You could say that."

"He'll be hard to miss." Ann pulled Sam into a comforting hug.

"I'm sorry about breakfast." Sam nodded toward the kitchen counter. "I promise I'll make it up to you."

"I rate a second date, huh?" Ann asked tentatively.

Sam pulled back and looked into Ann's eyes. "Well, technically we haven't had a first date yet." Sam kissed Ann full on the lips. "We will have to work on that too but right now we've got others to worry about." Sam caressed Ann's face.

Ann slid her hand up the back of Sam's neck and pulled her down for a final kiss.

They pull back and Sam managed a smile. "We're definitely going to have to work on that dating thing." She placed a light kiss on Ann's nose. "Soon, very soon."

Ann mirrored Sam's smile before taking her hand. "Come on, let's get dressed."

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Index Page

~ **Badges and Needles** ~
by Warrior Angel

For disclaimers see Part 1

Hey guys,

Thanks for the feedback. Keep doing it!

Enjoy,

WA

Part 17

Sam sped up through traffic, all the while struggling with the turmoil that was taking place inside of her. Part of her wanted to be ecstatic for the night she'd spent with Ann, but her heart was filled with worries for her brother. That's when Sam realized that she needed her brother just as much as she needed Ann but for very different reasons. The contradictory emotions were so overwhelming that they nearly drove Sam to the edge of tears. But crying would take time and she couldn't afford that luxury. Compromising to the best of her ability, she allowed a single tear to roll down her left cheek as she made her way closer to the area of devastation.

The horror of the scene soon swept over her in nightmarish proportions as hastily set barricades, police cars, and the wailing of sirens grew more prevalent. What should have acted as a warning only added to Sam's growing uneasiness.

Sam pulled the car to a stop when she could go no further and climbed through the yellow crime scene tape that impeded her way. A blast of dusty air swept across her face tinged with a strong smell of gas making her cough. She turned, surveying the crowd. The scene had already taken on circus-like proportions with a massive group of onlookers pressed tightly around the barricade.

Sam displayed her shield on a chain around her neck as she walked past the barricade dodging the press members that flashed their credentials trying to talk their way into the blast scene.

"Can we have a statement?" One press member shouted after her. Ignoring the question she walked farther into the rubble as the questions continued behind her.

"Can you confirm the source of the explosion?"

"Were there terrorists involved?"

"Damn vultures..." Sam muttered as she reached her boiling point. "They have nothing better to do than to feed off tragedy."

Approaching a uniformed police officer, Sam offered a warning. "Officer, I think you'd better call for reinforcement. Those barricades won't hold them for long."

"We've already called for it sergeant," he said eyeing the shield hanging around her neck.
"They're on the way."

Without adding further, Sam moved forward. The place looked like a movie scenario with cars in flames filling the gray sky with a huge spiral of smoke. The row of small shops that had lined the block was nearly all destroyed. At the far end of the block a small school bus rested on its side with its windows blown out. There were countless number of police officers, firefighters, and paramedics working on the rescue operation ebbing with the tide of hectic chaos surrounding them. Last but not least there were the injured, covered in blood and clearly distraught from the spontaneous disruption of their morning routines.

Sam stopped in front of the remains of one old building in particular. She felt her blood drain from her body when she realized that the only thing left of her brother's work place was bits and pieces of mangled iron beams and cracked bricks heaped haphazardly like a surrealistic painting she'd once seen in a museum of modern art.

Thoughts of Leo immediately flashed through her head. She took a deep breath and tilted her head upwards, staving off the tears that once again formed behind her eyes.

"Please God don't let my brother be buried under there."

Taking in another deep breath, Sam swept the area ahead until she spotted a familiar face working near a smoldering pile of debris.

"Megan..." Sam called already jogging towards the woman. "Megan Walker?"

A tall, strong looking firefighter stopped what she was doing and looked in the direction her name was being called. Seeing its source, a knowing smile slowly tugged the corners of her mouth upward and her cold gaze softened. She, like many others, had fallen under Sam's charms once, but different from the majority, she had managed to work a friendship out of their failed love affair.

"Sam, what are you doing here?"

"I'm looking for my brother."

"Which one: Toby or Leo?"

"Leo. He owns a gallery on-" Sam took another good look at what was left of the block and felt a shiver running down her spine.

"Jesus," Shock registered on Megan's face. "I'm sorry Sam. I didn't know." Megan looked around the area.

"Tell me you haven't seen him."

"Geez, Sam. Being all bloody and that, they kind of all look alike." Megan noted Sam's shoulders slump and quickly turned the conversation to a more upbeat tone. "Well, the good news is ninety-nine percent of that rubble has been cleared." Megan gazed at the wreckage thoughtfully then turned back to Sam. "I can assure you that there isn't anyone still down there...if he even was."

Megan's optimism did little to ease the pitch and roll of Sam's stomach.

"Where are they tending to the injured?" Sam asked.

"Those able to walk are being looked after over there." Megan pointed to a nearby hotel where a medical triage area had been set up. "Those with more serious injuries are being transported to Cabrini Medical, St. Luke's, or County General."

"Thanks Megan." Sam rushed toward the hotel, her heart filled with renewed hopes. "Please, God, let him be there," she whispered under her breath.

Outside County General hospital, Ann crossed the ambulance bay managing to squeeze her way through the anxious crowd standing around the building and spilling out into the streets. Ann flashed her hospital ID to the security detail placed at the entrance doors. After a quick glance at the photo she was allowed to enter.

"Doctor Thomas, I'm so glad to see you." The unit clerk made a theatrical show of it with his hand thrown up in the air before taking in her appearance. "Fabulous dress! What I wouldn't give up to fit in one of those."

Ignoring his comment, Ann surveyed the crowded ER. "Oscar, who's in charge?"

"Taylor and O'Neal have been at loggerheads since early morning. But they've managed to keep the board running."

"Good, let me go change."

On her way to the staff room, Ann grabbed a clean set of scrubs to replace the dress she was still wearing from the night before. Dodging a few gurneys on the way, she managed to reach the doctor's lounge only to be greeted by an appreciative whistle.

"Nice outfit doc, was that all just for Sam?" Danni teased as she batted her eyelashes and sighed dramatically. "I can see why you never made it home last night."

Ann hid a smile and stiff armed the door to the staff room.

"You have some beans to spill." Danni pressed as she followed Ann into the room.

"Later." Ann slipped out of her dress and heels. "Right now we've got casualties that are way more important than my love life."

"You're telling me? I've been running around this hospital since seven o'clock this morning."

"How many nurses do we have?" Ann put on the scrubs and retrieved a pair of sneakers from her locker.

"Everybody that isn't on vacation is here including all of the off duty doctors now that you've finally arrived." Danni narrowed her eyes realizing that Ann was avoiding the topic. "Don't change the subject."

"What subject?" Ann put on her lab coat and tossed her stethoscope around her neck.

"You went out last night to have dinner with your mother and potentially discuss your breaking up with dull boy." Danni stated as she followed Ann out of the locker room and into the hallway. "Now, you show up here dressed as if your night had continued all the way up to this morning and with Sam I might add."

"First of all what I do-" Ann turned to face her friend the same time as the front doors burst open and paramedics wheeled in another victim. "...is taking care of the sick and injured first. This is going to have to wait for later. Speaking of which, I think they could use a nurse." She pursed her lips cynically and nodded toward the newest arrival.

"Yes, Doctor. I'll get on that right away." Danni answered sarcastically, moving to join the group surrounding the gurney.

"Not here and not now," Ann muttered under her breath as she closed in on the unit clerk. "Hey Oscar, I need your help. I'm looking for a man."

"Aren't we all?" The effeminate characteristics of the man spoke louder than his voice.

"I mean a patient. He's tall with dark hair, blue eyes-"

"Sounds like a hunk." Oscar fanned himself with the chart he was holding.

Ann scribbled the name on a piece of paper and handed it to the clerk. "I need to see if he's here."

"Leo Matthews," he mused. "I'm on it."

"Thanks. Give me a page if you dig up any information on his whereabouts." Ann circled the desk and moved toward the trauma rooms. She surveyed the first room she passed bustling with activity.

"Taylor, need a hand in there?"

The masked doctor glanced over to the doorway. "Thanks Ann, I'm all set. We'll be on our way up to the OR as soon as I get this chest tube sutured in."

"Okay." Ann turned nearly crashing into a resident rolling a patient on a stretcher to an exam room down the hall. The man was holding his chest visibly in pain. "Whoa! What do we have here?"

"Mr. Gallant, a security guard from one of the buildings downtown. He started hyperventilating and complaining of chest pains."

"Mr. Gallant, what's going on?" Ann visually started examining the patient. He was pale and sweating.

"I don't feel so good."

"Your chest hurts?" Ann queried.

"Yeah and it feels like my head is spinning around like a top the whole time there is an elephant sitting on my chest." The patient snorted then clutched at his chest. "Now isn't that a circus act if I ever saw one."

Ann adjusted her stethoscope into her ears and placed the head of it onto the man's chest. "I'd like you to take in some slow, deep breaths if you're able to." Slowly she moved it from one side to the other and then listened to the man's breath sounds on his back.

Ann removed the stethoscope from her ears and turned to address the resident.

"Put him on oxygen, give him aspirin 81 mg dose and get an EKG."

"Sure can, boss." The young doctor nodded eagerly and pushed the gurney into an exam room just as Ann's pager went off.

"Now who wants me?" Ann jerked her pager from the waist of her scrub pants and pressed the button revealing the message. "Finally," she muttered and rushed to the nurses' desk.

"Give me some good news, Oscar." Ann tapped her fingers nervously on the counter top.

"Handsome boy is here..." he pointed to a far room. "He's in exam three with Chou."

"Thanks Oscar, you're the best." Ann crossed the hall and met with Dr. Chou coming out of the exam room.

"Chou, can I talk to you for a second?"

"Of course, what's up?"

"Your patient..." Ann pointed to the room he had just come out of. "A friend of mine is looking for her brother and I think your patient might be him. Do you have a name?"

"Sure," he opened the file in his hands. "Matthews, Leo. Is that him?"

"Yes, that's him. Thanks Chou." Relief washed over Ann. She retrieved her cell phone from her pocket and started typing a text message as Chou excused himself. Lifting her head, Ann looked at the retreating doctor and called out. "Oh, and one more thing, Chou, do you mind assigning him to me?"

"Not at all, Boss." He stepped back and handed the file to her. "If you haven't noticed, there's a surplus of other patients to keep me busy."

Continued...

**Warrior Angel's Scrolls
Index Page**

~ Badges and Needles ~
by Warrior Angel

For disclaimers see Part 1

Hey guys,

Thanks for the feedback. Keep doing it!

Enjoy,

WA

Part 18

"Would you please hold still?" Danni tried to keep the patient on his stretcher but he kept struggling against her. "You're going to end up falling and hurting yourself."

"No, I won't. Let go of me," he pushed up again. "I need to get going, I have a meeting in half an hour."

Danni blocked the patient's attempt to get past her. "Okay, tell me with whom?"

"I...ah...His name was..." The patient was obviously drawing a blank.

"You can't remember, can you?"

Silence filled the room only to be broken by an exasperated sigh.

"Like this ever changes," Danni muttered under her breath. "Okay, Let's start with the simple questions first. Tell me what your name is."

He rolled his eyes. "That's easy. My name is..."

"Yes?" Danni folded her arms over her chest and tapped the toe of her sneaker on the tile floor. "I'm waiting."

"It's a..." He drew his brows together in deep concentration but the sound of Danni clearing her throat disturbed his focus. "Damn it! I had it right on the tip of my tongue and you just chased it away."

"I think your meeting has been called off." Danni sighed and blocked his way one more time. "In case you haven't noticed, you're in a hospital."

"Hospital?" His eyes widened sending a bolt of pain right to his head. "Shit!" The patient groaned but tried to get up again. "I have to call my family." He edged off the bed and gained a foothold on the floor but stumbled, falling back onto the stretcher. "On second thought maybe you should, 'cause I can't seem, to remember the numbers, that along with my name." He said rubbing his right temple with his fingers.

"Don't you worry the hospital will get in touch with your family as soon as the phone lines get a little less crowded. Come on, Le-"

"Leo!" He sat up as though he'd had a stroke of genius. "That's it! My name is Leo. See, I told you it was on the tip of my tongue," He asserted proudly.

"Well, now that we have that out in the open, how about we get you back onto your stretcher." Danni helped him settle back into his pillow then grabbed his arm to start cleaning out the small slivers of glass from a wound on his forearm.

Leo studied Danni's face as she began cleaning out his wound. "So..."

"Yeah, I think you're going to need a few stitches there." She pointed toward his forehead.

"Huh?" Leo drew one eyebrow up causing him pain. "Yowl! That hurts."

"You wanted to know if you needed stitches, didn't you?"

"No. I was just trying to make some small talk." He reached for the injured area on his forehead but Danni smacked his hand away before he had a chance to touch the lacerated flesh on his forehead.

"Hey, I thought your motto was to 'do no harm'."

"That's part of the Hippocratic Oath and no, I don't live by it. I'm not a doctor you know. Now sit still and let me take care of this so you don't go getting it infected and we have to chop it off."

The whites of Leo's eyes could be seen entirely around his irises. He held perfectly still, more out of shocked fright than obedience.

"Are you always this bossy?" Leo grimaced as Danni pulled a piece of glass out of his flesh.

She pinned him with a look that could kill. "Yes, but only with the uncooperative ones."

A sigh of relief escaped Leo's lips. "Good, cause I'm usually a naughty boy." He winked at her.

"Are you really flirting with me?"

"Of course I am. At least I think I was...am. Anyway, my meeting is off and you won't let me leave this place, so what else can I do?"

Staring directly into Leo's eyes, Danni narrowed her gaze.

Not to be out done, Leo did the same. Locked in a match of wills, neither of them noticed the door to the room opening and Ann stepping inside.

"I'm sorry, am I interrupting something?" Ann asked.

Their concentration broken, both Danni and Leo were startled to see Ann approaching them.

"Hi, I'm Doctor Thomas. I'll be taking care of you now."

"What happened to Jackie Chan?" Leo sized up his new doctor. "Not that I'm complaining."

"You mean Dr. Chou?" Ann donned a pair of gloves. "He's attending to another emergency."

"There go my martial arts pointers but I won't mind as long as I get to keep the cute doctor. Maybe you have a few pointers you'd like to give me."

"So, now you're flirting with her." Danni arched a challenging eyebrow.

His sheepish nature was more than evident when he had nothing to say.

"I see," Danni scoffed. "You're attracted to strong women."

"Don't get jealous. You're much more my type." Leo tried to wiggle his eyebrows but winced rather hastily instead.

"Does your head hurt?" Ann took out a penlight from her pocket and examined his eyes and ears.

"Yeah, it's killing me like a two day hangover from a good bachelor's party."

"No blood from the ears, pupils equal and reactive to light." Ann stated then turned to Danni. "Any seizure-like activity noted?"

"No," Danni shook her head.

"Have you noticed tremors of any kind?"

"Not while I've been trying to sit on him so I can get this glass cleaned out of his wound."

"Hmm..." Ann pursed her lips in thought. "Follow my finger with your eyes, please." She started moving her finger in front of Leo's face.

"I'm fine, really." Leo argued, not following her instructions.

"Let me be the judge to that. Now pay attention, please." Ann hid a smirk. *Stubbornness runs in the family I see.*

Resigned to his fate, Leo complied as best he could in his present condition.

"Damn it, Doc. You're moving that finger faster than I can blink."

"That's because you're not fine. Danni, order a CT scan of his head," Ann signed the chart and handed it back to her. "Tell them I want it done STAT."

"Yes, right away." Danni nodded and left the room.

"Hey! Don't be gone too long," Leo called after the retreating nurse. "I don't want to feel lonely."

"Oh, you won't be lonely. I'll be right here with you, suturing up that gash on your forehead. Ann grabbed a suture kit and a few other supplies before she pulled a stool over and started cleaning the nasty wound.

"So, what happened?" Ann asked taking hold of his face gently.

"I don't remember much. I had just parked my car..." he winced and gasped as the sterile water irrigated his cut.

"Be careful or you'll have both of us sopping wet," Ann cautioned as she repositioned her catch basin.

"I'm good at that."

"What, parking your car?"

"No, getting women wet." Leo winked at Ann.

Ann let the remark slide and continued on like a true professional. "And you were saying about what you remember from this morning," she prompted.

"I was about to reach for the door of the building when...BAM-" Leo clapped his hands together. "That's all I remember."

"Last one," Ann flushed the cut using the last of the solution then tossed the bottle into the trash. She picked up a handful of sterile gauze and patted the area of the cut dry. Reaching for the mayo stand positioned next to her, Ann moved a bit closer.

"What are you doing?" Leo pulled back at the sight of a syringe with a big needle in Ann's hand.

"You need stitches."

"That's what she said, too. Is it going to hurt?" Leo's gaze stayed fixed on the needle of the syringe.

"That's what this is for. I'm going to numb the area so that it won't hurt." She raised the syringe higher for him to see. "Now what do you say we get started?"

"Okay," Leo said but his heart wasn't in it.

Ann repositioned his face closer again. She cleansed the affected area with Betadine then used a local anesthetic before starting to stitch the wound closed. "That doesn't hurt now, does it?"

"No, I guess not."

"Good," Ann said continuing with her sutures. "So, what happened next after the big boom?"

"I don't know, when I came back to my senses I was lying flat on my back surrounded by paramedics. There wasn't a good looking one insight, by the way. Now the firefighter, she was a real good looker if you know what I mean. It's a shame she had to be all covered up in protective clothing."

"I can see that you have a real thing for women, don't you?"

Leo smiled. "What can I say, it runs in my family."

The statement caught Ann off guard as she choked out her reply. "Do you have a big family?"

"Not really. There's my mother, an older brother and my baby sister." He tried to touch his temple but Ann stopped him.

"Don't," she cautioned.

"But my head hurts."

"I know." She offered sympathetically. "Tell me more about your family."

"Big brother is married with two children. He's wife is called..." He exhaled a long breath. "His wife...her name's...uh...it's..."

"Leo?" Ann frowned as she tied the final knot to the suture and removed the sterile drape to get a better look at her patient. "Are you feeling alright?"

"I don't know. I feel kind of sleepy."

"It is okay, Leo. Considering your symptoms, I'd say you probably have a concussion." She sent him an encouraging smile.

"Hey, flirt-boy," Danni reappeared bringing in a wheelchair with her. "Someone's here to see you."

Ann and Leo turned to the door where Sam was coming through.

"Sis, thank God."

Ann stood up and stepped aside allowing Sam to lean in and kiss Leo's hair affectionately.

Stealing a glance at Sam, Ann could swear she saw her eyes glistening with unshed tears. Ann's chest tightened as she fought to keep her hands to herself and not hug Sam right then and there.

Leo's voice broke Ann's musing.

"How did you find me?"

"I have my sources." Sam stole a quick glance at Ann who was standing off to her side then focused back on her brother. "Are you doing okay?"

"Sure, I've been treated by the hottest staff members."

Ann held back a giggle when Sam turned to her and rolled her eyes.

"Is he okay?" Sam looked into Ann's eyes and fought off a silly grin.

"He's fine. Just some small laceration wounds on his forearm and hands, I've stitched the gash on his forehead. I've also ordered a head CT and a bed for twenty-three hours ob...obser-"

All eyes were on Ann as her speech slowed to a whisper. They watched the color fade from her face as her lips started to move only this time no sound was emitted.

"Ann?" Danni furrowed her brows.

"I don't think you look to good, Doc." Leo commented.

Ann wilted slowly like a delicate rose in the heat of day before stumbling sideways and nearly crashing into the mayo stand.

"Ann!" Sam stepped forward and eased her lover into a chair. She then turned to see a look of shock and surprise on both Danni's and Leo's face before kneeling down and focusing on Ann again. "What is it? What's wrong?"

"I don't know, I guess I'm a little hypoglycemic." Ann threaded her fingers through Sam's dark trances to put her at ease. "I haven't eaten in a while. Actually, I haven't eaten since yesterday morning."

"That's over twenty-four hours, Ann." Sam scolded gently.

"I couldn't have lunch and dinner was...well, complicated." She offered Sam a knowing smile. "And I skipped breakfast this morning."

Their eyes met and in that split of second a subtle but sultry smile reached their faces.

"Come on, I'll take you to get something to eat," Sam offered.

"I can't." Ann argued, suddenly aware of the other people in the room. "I have to work."

"Someone can take your place," Sam stated firmly. Standing up, she looked over to Danni. "Is there any place to get food that doesn't come out of a vending machine around here?"

"Yeah..." Danni blinked then blinked again trying to figure out the dynamics of the whole situation. "There's the hospital cafeteria. It's down the hall and to the left just past the gift shop."

"Then that's where we're headed." Sam helped Ann up. "She's taking a break."

Sam and Ann left the room leaving an astonished looking couple behind.

"What did I miss?" Leo asked when he found his voice again.

"I'm not sure." Danni thought for a moment. "What's your sister's name?"

"Sam," Leo answered cautiously.

"And with that little tidbit of information," Danni snickered, "It's beginning to make perfect sense to me."

"Really?" Leo sounded surprised.

"Yeap! I can say that I'm ninety-nine point nine percent sure."

Leo waited but when no further explanation came he addressed the issue. "Are you going to tell me?"

A sly smugness came over Danni as she turned a knowing eye toward Leo.

"I would if I could but I don't have the time." Danni patted the wheelchair and gave Leo her most welcoming smile. "You have a date with a Cat Scan."

Sensing a change in directions, Leo added one of his own. "Ah, but the real question is: do I have a date with you?" He eased himself onto the chair struggling against his dizzying state.

"Maybe, but first we'll have to see if you have any brains up there." She motioned toward his head.

"Oh, I can assure you there are. I'm a rare case of complete package - brains and looks." Leo grinned. "So, what time do I pick you up?"

"If you don't mind, I'll wait for the results of the scan before setting a date." Danni scoffed as she wheeled him out of the room.

Moments later, Sam sat across the table from Ann. The look on her face could best be described as one of amazed-amusement as she watched Ann seriously devouring her breakfast.

"You're like a bear, aren't you?" Sam teased with a single raised eyebrow.

"A bear?" Ann stuffed another piece of waffle into her mouth. "Why, do I look fat?"

Sam threw her head back and released a genuine laugh earning a few curious glances. "No, not all..." She shook her head and enjoyed the puzzled look coming from Ann. "You know, before going into hibernation, bears eat tons of food so they can go through the entire winter without eating."

"And...?"

"Well, that's what you do, isn't it? You store up as much food as you can so you can go fasting twenty-four hours straight, right?" Sam bit her lower lip trying hard not laugh.

Ann chuckled and shook her head while washing the food down with a large gulp of OJ. "If you're trying to make me blush, it's not going to work."

"Oh, really?"

"Really. When it comes to food, I'm shameless." Ann smirked, shoving another piece of waffle in her mouth. "Besides, I do have to store some food, because God knows when I'm going to have time to eat again. I need to keep my energy level up."

"In that case..." Sam pushed her plate forward. "Here, have mine. Who knows, you might have to spend some extra energy tonight." Sam smiled provocatively causing Ann to choke around her swallow. "Oh, now you blush???" Sam offered her a napkin when Ann started coughing harder. "You have no shame to eat like that, but when I make an innocent comment implying sex you turn beet red?" Sam teased mercilessly.

"It's not that..." Ann coughed a little more before gathering the courage to look at Sam. "It's because...well, you know..." Sam's brow furrowed at Ann's hesitance. "I've never...before you, last night was the first time-"

"Oh, no..." Sam's face lit up when she realized what the problem was. "I don't buy the 'that was my first time' bullshit talking."

"I swear, I had never-" Ann looked around the place and lowered her voice. "I had never been with a woman before."

"Then, I'm really lucky." Sam whispered leaning closer to Ann. "Because you're a natural." Sam winked and felt her insides churning when Ann blushed.

Sam had to fight not to reach across the table and kiss Ann right then and there. *You're falling hard for her, Mathews.*

Sam stared at Ann's green eyes sensing a healing energy emanating from them.

She's just what the doctor prescribed.

Both women were so lost in each others gaze, that they didn't hear somebody approaching the table. The sound of someone clearing their throat startled them sending another wave of flush into Ann's cheeks.

"Mark," Sam acknowledged her partner.

"Finally, I found you." He stopped by Sam's side.

"The question is 'how'?"

"Through the GPS device I.A. installed in your cell phone, of course."

Sam's eyes went big and round as she nearly jumped from her seat. "What?"

"Gotcha." Mark sneered at her. "I went to see Leo and an Amazonian looking nurse said you might be here." He finally turned to Ann. "Dr Thomas," he offered his hand politely. "It's turning into quite a routine us running into each other."

"It's always a pleasure lieutenant." She shook his hand.

"I'm really sorry to interrupt your meal, but I need to speak with my partner." He informed.

"Now?" Sam's voice was louder than it needed to be.

"Yes. Unless, of course, you've changed your profession and are taking up doctoring."

"What the hell are you talking about, Mark? I haven't changed-"

"Yes, you have," he cut her off. "The detective that I know would be jumping at the gun for news of a lead in a case."

"Can't you see we're eating? Interruption is bad for digestion," Sam scoffed.

"It's important." He threw her a knowing glance.

"That's okay." Ann offered gently. "I need to get back to the ER anyway."

"But you haven't finished-" Sam looked at the nearly empty dishes on the table. "Mine...entirely."

Ann chuckled getting up from her seat. "Don't worry detective. I have plenty of energy stored for any situation that may arise." She winked flirtingly causing Sam's insides to mush up. "I'll see you later." Ann held Sam in her gaze for a few seconds before turning to Mark. "Good to see you again lieutenant."

"The pleasure was all mine," Mark nodded before taking Ann's seat. He waited until Sam's gaze left the retreating woman and turned to him. "Do you care to explain how it went from 'we're done' and 'I never want to see her again' to sneaky flirting glances around breakfast in less than twenty-four hours?"

"We talked." She shrugged nonchalantly

"Elaborate." He narrowed his eyes.

"She came by my apartment last night and we talked...a little." Sam averted her eyes raising Mark's suspicions.

"Bullshit! You did more than talking. You slept with her, didn't you?"

Sam sat straight before leaning closer to her partner. "And what business would it be of yours anyway if I did." She narrowed her glance in Mark's direction establishing a change of subjects. "You said you had something important to talk about."

"Right," taking the hint Mark turned into a professional mode. "Lab results came back. The skin under the victim's nails and the pictures from the surveillance cameras all match up to-"

Their eyes met and they said the name in unison. "Sergeant Miller."

"We got him Sam. I.A. wants us to break him so the D.A. can work out a deal. Miller gives the name of his sponsors and they take the death penalty off the table."

"What are we waiting for?" Sam jumped from her seat already grabbing her jacket. "Let's arrest the son of a bitch."

"What about Leo?" Mark followed Sam out of the cafeteria.

"I'm working on it." A wicked smile formed on Sam's face as she tapped a number on her speed dial then held her cell phone to her ear. "Mom, we've found Leo. I need you to come down here right away. He's at County General hospital."

"We?" Mark's curiosity was peaked. "Very interesting..."

Continued...

**Warrior Angel's Scrolls
Index Page**

**~ Badges and Needles ~
by Warrior Angel**

For disclaimers see Part 1

Author's note:

If you guys want to check on NYPD signal codes here's the link:

<http://www.n2nov.net/nypdcodes.html>

Don't forget to feed the Bard!

Enjoy,

WA

Part 19

The sound of an agonizing scream drew Ann's attention as she approached the nurses' station. Looking around, she saw a resident struggling against a patient that refused to let the doctor touch his badly broken leg.

"Davis, what's going on?"

The resident turned to see the chief of the ER looking directly at him. "Dr. Thomas, I...I..." he stammered out defensively before turning his attention back toward his patient. "This patient has a severe fracture of his tibia."

Ann glanced down at the patient's leg. "Yeah, I can see that." Ann addressed the wound with shard bone ends sticking through it. "Don't you think he needs something for the pain?" She crossed her arms over her chest.

"He won't even take an aspirin," Davis explained defensively. "He says it interferes with the spiritual evolution."

"In my country pain is seen as a way to elevate the spirit," the patient offered with a strong Indian accent all the while his face was contorted in pain.

"That's very enlightening Mr.-" Ann peeked on the file Davis was holding. "Mr. Rajiv, but you need surgery." Ann then eyed the resident sternly. "If you haven't already, call for an orthopedic consult. Let them deal with it in the operating room."

The patient dipped his head. "Thank you, ma'am."

"It's the least we can do given your strong beliefs." Ann smiled graciously then turned and walked away. She didn't get very far before a waving hand caught her attention.

"What's up, Danni?"

"CT results are back." Danni pointed at the computer next to her.

"Good, let me take a look." Ann took a seat and analyzed the information on the computer screen.

"Where's Sam?" Danni teased.

Ann bit the inside of her cheek pretending to focus on the results. "Got it all figured out, have you?"

"It wasn't very hard after the exchanging of smug looks and that big dose of TLC." Danni narrowed her gaze waiting for Ann to look at her. When her friend refused eye contact she jabbed. "Why haven't you told me that Sam was a woman?"

"Haven't I?" Ann faked innocence.

"Don't be a smart ass!" Danni slapped Ann's arm playfully. "You have a lot to tell."

Ann finally turned to meet Danni's gaze. "Are you going to judge me?"

Danni's eyes widened in shock and she grasped Ann's arm pulling her up and into a private corner. "Why would I judge you?"

Ann averted her gaze. "Some people will. They'll freak when they hear that I'm dating a woman."

"First of all, you're calling me 'some people'?" Danni faked receiving a blow on the stomach. "Ouch! Second, if I have to judge something, I'll use the evidence that I see, and what I see is a gleam in your eyes. A gleam that, in twenty years of friendship, I've never seen before. What I see is a silly grin that refuses to leave your lips and a glow that envelopes you every time you speak her name. Not to mention that your skin is, like Oscar would put it..." She stretched her palms in front of her face theatrically. "Flawless."

They shared a chuckle.

"I would never freak to see my best friend falling in love," Danni said seriously.

"This **is** love, isn't it?" Ann wrinkled her nose.

Danni nodded. "I think it is and it looks good on you."

"Thanks," Ann tried hard not to blush.

"When did you know?"

"I think I've fallen for Sam since the first time I saw her. I didn't recognize it for what it was but after last night," Ann paused dramatically releasing a subtle sigh, "I haven't got a single question in my mind."

"Good. So tonight you grab a six pack of beer and come by my place. We have something to discuss."

"What?" Ann's brow furrowed. "I've just spilled my guts out to you in a nut shell."

"Not about you or Sam. I want to talk about her brother."

"Leo?"

"Yeah," Danni's eyes gleamed. "That's the one."

"Oh boy," Ann sighed staring at images of Leo's brain on the monitor screen. Random thoughts filtered through her brain until one slapped her right between the eyes.

"But hey, tonight I have..." Ann looked up only to find that Danni was already gone. "Plans and they don't involve three."

"For the hundredth time Mark, I'm not saying anything." Sam narrowed her eyes at her partner. "I don't want to jinx it. So let it alone."

"Come on Sam, I've been following this love story since the beginning. Should I remind you that I was the one to find out that Dr. Thomas was 'Dr Angel'?" He lifted his eyebrow defiantly.

"Mark-"

"Oh please, we're more than partners, Sam. We're -"

"Friends," Sam deadpanned. "And friends should know when to drop the matter. End of discussion." She looked at her watch before releasing an impatient breath. "And if this bozo doesn't come around soon, it's going to be the end of this stake-out. I'm going batty from setting in this car and staring at Miller's front door for over two hours now. Besides, I've got to be somewhere in a little while."

"Where is it tonight, your place or hers?" Mark teased. "Then again I've heard there is always an element of excitement to doing it in a hospital on-call room where someone might walk in on you."

Before Sam could bark a smartass comeback, she spied a car pulling into the curb.

"Mark," Sam cautioned, her eyes never leaving the man inside the car. "I think we just got lucky."

"Speak for yourself." Mark reached inside his pocket and retrieved a candy bar. "Tonight's Allison's night out with the girls."

"Now who's the idiot here?" Sam spat out.

"Yeah, but I'm the one that's been happily married for-"

"Look!" She backhanded his arm and pointed in the newly arrived car's direction.

"What?" He focused more intently on the car as the man behind the wheel turned to gaze into his side mirror before opening up the car door. "Oh, shit!"

Mark chucked the candy into the back seat with one hand and reached for the door handle with the other. Slowly they ventured from their post, treading lightly so as not to startle their prey. Finally when they were little more than two car lengths away, Mark made his move.

"Martin Miller," Mark raised his voice as he flashed his badge. "NYPD, please step away from the car."

Miller didn't comply. His cold, calculated stare was meant to send a chill right through them. Time seemed to warp to a stand still and that's when Miller jumped at his chance. He dove back inside the vehicle and hastily sped away.

"Damn it." Mark's frustration was evident as he ran back to their car and slid into the driver seat. Sam wasn't more than a step behind him heading for the passenger door where she quickly jumped in and attached the portable red light to the car's roof top. Screeching tires signaled the start of the hot pursuit while the sound of the siren wailed a warning for everyone to get out of the way.

Sam grabbed the microphone for the radio as Mark accelerated to keep up with Miller's car.

"Dispatch, this is Five Henry Twelve, we have a 10-88."

"Five Henry Twelve go ahead," the radio answered back.

"Miller, Martin, African American male, six foot, wanted for murder, driving silver Dodge Intrepid, Alpha - Echo - Sierra - 4 - 9 - 2- 5 ."

"Copy that. Five Henry Twelve please confirm your location."

"Suspect is moving Northeast on Amsterdam Avenue."

"Copy that."

The pursuit was picking up speed as Sam watched Miller suddenly turn left across oncoming traffic, earning a cacophony of angry horns from drivers moving in both directions.

Miller's tires squealed through traffic curving 'Ss' on the road until he forced an older model, flatbed truck to spin away, hit the curb, and crash through a fence into the front yard of a house. Mark had to swerve around the rear end of the truck and speed up to stay with Miller.

"He's taking the West Side Highway." Sam blurted out over the squeal of tires and the blaring of horns.

Miller raced down a side street that ran parallel to the highway and headed up to the ramp, but at the very last second he yanked his car onto a paved slope and maneuvered right onto West 16th street. His car bounced from side to side as it hit the road and teetered for a moment. Somehow, Miller managed to get all four wheels back onto the ground and accelerated once more.

Mark hit the brakes hard and the car spun through half a turn. He wrenched the steering wheel and the car turned around the rest of the way. Once again, they followed the Intrepid down onto the street and across 5th Avenue. One after the other they turned right around the perimeter of the Union Square. That's where Mark closed the gap between them as he stepped on the gas and white knuckled the wheel.

"Let's put an end to this chase before somebody gets killed."

Sam drew her weapon and took aim out the passenger side window. She fired off two consecutive rounds in hasty form just as Miller swerved to the right and then back to the left.

Ping! Ping! The sound of bullets striking metal sliced through the air.

"Fuck! Hold it steady, Mark."

"This is as good as it gets." He braced his arms against the wheel and thought of something to egg his partner on with. "Where's that sharp shooting medal when you need it?"

More determined than ever, Sam took aim and squeezed the trigger as though she had all the time in the world.

BANG! The driver's side front tire erupted; sending fragments of rubber tread flying. Unable to be steered, Miller's car veered toward the side of the road, metal on asphalt trailing sprays of sparks and a sound similar to nails being raked down a blackboard. It wasn't long before an unsuspecting fire hydrant took the brunt of the crash. A fountain of water spewed into the air as the hydrant was ripped from its mooring.

"There," Sam gloated. "That's how I got my medal."

With a proud smile, Mark sent the car into a controlled skid, pulling the vehicle to a halt.

Mark surveyed the scene. "Well, that sure stopped him. Let's get the son of a bitch."

The two cops exited their vehicle but stopped dead on their track as the door of Miller's car flung open.

"Jesus H. Christ!" Mark's eyes widened at the sight of a gun barrel pointing in their direction. "Doesn't this guy ever stop? He's like the fucking Terminator."

"Mark, get back." Sam warned when a blast of semi-automatic gunfire split the air as Miller rolled out of his damaged vehicle.

Sam dove for a telephone pole while Mark tucked down and ran behind the nearest vehicle. That was all the time Miller needed to make his exit from the wreckage.

"Damn it." Mark stuck his finger through the ragged hole in his pants leg as he sat huddled in a ball with his back against the wheel. "Allison warned me not to wear my best suit today."

"Mark, are you hurt?" Sam yelled crouching behind the telephone pole.

"Not until I get home," he muttered.

Sam stood and carefully edged out to return fire but Miller was already on a dead run from the wreckage.

"Shit! He's getting away."

Sam started the foot pursuit with Mark following close behind. Side by side, the two made a mad dash as they shoved their way through the crowd. Intermittent shrieks accompanied by shocked expressions signaled the individual's horror at seeing guns waving in their faces.

"Lie down!"

"Get out of the way."

"Lie down I said. What are you people, deaf?" Sam swung her gun back and forth trying to get a clear shot at the fleeing felon.

Without slowing his pace, Miller turned and fired twice. The bullets lashed the pavement next to Sam and ricocheted off of a newsstand sending splintered pieces of wood flying everywhere. In an effort to stave off injury from the flying debris an old lady stumbled in front of Sam who instinctively outstretched her hand and caught the woman to soften her fall. Sam attributed the sharp pain in her upper arm to her off balanced catch and eased the woman to the ground.

Side stepping his partner, Mark picked up his pace and caught up with Miller at a jammed crossroad. A quick step onto a bumper and off the fender of a stopped vehicle gave Mark the edge as he launched himself in Miller's direction. Agile hands intercepted the weapon as it was brought to bear down on him. The impact of one body against another shoved Miller against the hood of a car sending his gun flying. Miller, though stunned initially, fought back hitting Mark hard in the face. The force of the blow caused Mark to stagger backwards. That was all Miller needed to break free. In a flash he was off and running only to be blindsided by another flying tackle.

"Oomph!"

Two bodies struck the ground with a thud but only one stirred a few seconds later. Slowly Sam pushed herself up.

"Martin Miller," Sam used her knee to keep him in place. "You are under arrest for the murder of Glory Wilson." She tugged his hands together and handcuffed him. "You have the right to remain silent." She stood up and pulled him to his feet. "Anything you say may be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to-

"Fuck you!" Miller barked.

"No, you don't have that right." Sam jerked him aside as she acknowledged Mark's presence. "But you'd better find a good lawyer because you made my partner run and he hates running."

Mark snorted rubbing his bruised face as he secured the discarded automatic weapon. "Not to mention assault, fleeing the scene of an accident, and endangering the public with intent to kill." He closed in on his partner. His mouth dropped open when the red stain on Sam's arm came into his view.

"You're bleeding." He said rather alarmed.

"Am I? Where?" Sam cast a passing gaze over her torso.

"There," Mark pointed to her upper sleeve.

"Oh, that. It's nothing." She shrugged nonchalantly.

"But how did you? Were you shot?" He asked taking Miller from her grasp.

Sam thought for a moment. "I must have gotten it when I caught the old bro...lady," she corrected herself. "It's more like a scratch maybe."

"A scratch my ass."

She looked down at the upper arm of her coat sleeve with blood soaking through the torn material. "Well, maybe nicked...a little."

"Either way it ruined that jacket and the rest of your day not to mention my suit and shift. Now I'm going to have to do all the paperwork to process this piece of shit and you know how much I love doing paperwork." Mark glared at Miller then pushed him forward, signaling Sam to follow him. "Come on. I'll drop you back at the ER on the way to the station."

"I'm okay, I don't need to go to the-" A naughty smile broke on her face. "On second thought, maybe I do need to go see a doctor."

"And I bet I know just the one you want to see." Mark shook his head and chuckled. "Hey, you get shot then you go to the hospital." He turned and looked at her. "Isn't that how this whole thing started?"

Sam beamed with pride as she exchanged a knowing smile with Mark.

Mark jerked back Miller's arm when he got in the way. "Hey! What are you looking at?" He followed Miller's gaze to Sam's chest. "Don't answer that. I already know. Now get into the car. We're going to take a nice ride back to the station. We've got some old friends of yours dying to see you again."

Concluded...

Warrior Angel's Scrolls Index Page

~ Badges and Needles ~

by Warrior Angel

For disclaimers see Part 1

Hey guys,

I just want to thank all of you who got this far. Thank you for the reviews and feedback; it's been a nice ride.

Thank you KD for helping me improving the story, you're a huge part of it!

Enjoy the conclusion,

WA

Part 20

Sam recognized Leo's whining tone even before she opened the door to his room. Without bothering to disguise her smirk, she entered the room to find her brother engaged in a telephone conversation.

"I'm telling you mom, there's no need for me to spend any recovery time in Jersey. I'm fine...Honestly the doctor said my head scan is clear. She's only keeping me here for protocol sake." Leo juggled the receiver to the other ear and acknowledged his sister's presence with a curt nod of his head. "I know mom, and I'm really sorry you got stuck in traffic, but Sam is here now so you don't have to...yeah, yeah...Okay, hang on a second."

Leo shot daggers at his sister before thrusting the phone in her direction. "She wants to talk to you."

Sam reached for the phone only to have Leo pull it back from her grasp. He narrowed his eyes threateningly at her.

"Agree with her and you're dead meat."

Sam's smirk became a full teasing grin as she snapped her fingers sharply then extended her hand for the phone.

Resolved to his fate, Leo relinquished the phone.

"Wimp," Sam muttered as she brought the receiver up to her ear.

"Hi, mom...Yeah, I'm fine. I thought you'd be here by now." Sam looked tauntingly at her brother. "Yeah, I hate traffic too...Leo? Oh, I don't know he looks okay to me. No more banged up than usual...No, I haven't spoken to the doctor in the last couple of hours, but she had told me she'd keep him for observation anyway...Yes, that will give you plenty of time to get here." She stifled a chuckle when Leo rolled his eyes in exasperation. "Okay mom, Love you too. See you later."

"I hate you," Leo barked.

"No you don't." Sam put the receiver back onto its cradle as she leaned in toward his ear and whispered, "You love me."

"Whatever." Leo extended his lip into a pout that any five year old would be proud of. "Where did you disappear to anyway?"

"Duty called. We finally had a lead on that son of a bitch we've been trying to catch."

"So, you got him?"

"Yeah," Sam said with a satisfied head shake. "We got him alright but not before he blew a hole through Mark's best suit."

"Mark's alright?"

"Yeah, he'll live to hear his wife say 'I told you so'." She tousled his hair making it a little more unruly than normal. "How's the head?"

"Better. Doc gave me something for-" his eyes widened at Sam's torn jacket sleeve. "Hey, it looks like Mark wasn't the only one to get his clothing trashed. Wait, is...is that blood?"

"Oh that? It's nothing." She shrugged dismissively.

"Nothing my ass, you're bleeding and that more than likely means you've been hurt." He pressed the call button for a nurse. "Were you shot or something?"

Sam didn't answer, she simply shrugged.

Leo shook his head in exasperation. "What are you, a magnet that attracts nothing but hot chicks and bullets?"

She chuckled "I think it runs in the family." She looked down at her arm and then back at Leo who continued to jab the call button. "What are you doing?"

"I'm calling my nurse, moron. You need a doctor."

"No, I don't need-" Sam stopped mid-sentence when the door burst open to a very annoyed looking Danni.

"For as many times as you've pushed that damn call bell you'd better be dying." She glared at Leo.

"Nope, I'm not dying at all. Actually, I'm fine. Thanks for thinking about me though." He offered cynically.

"Look, I have some really sick patients to attend to." She placed her hands on her hips. "I don't have time to play any silly-"

"She was shot." Leo fired off in a rush as he pointed accusatorially at his sister.

Danni's quickly riveted in Sam's direction. "Were you?"

"It's just a scratch really." Sam offered indicating her wound.

"Let me take a look at it."

"It's nothing." Sam withdrew her arm as Danni stepped closer to her.

Danni let out an impatient sigh. "Remove your jacket."

Sam complied hesitantly. "Are you always this bossy?"

"Like an Amazon." Leo winked flirtingly at Danni.

"Anyway," Danni examined Sam's arm briefly then turned, grabbed some gauze and pressed them against the wound. "Here, keep pressure on it. I'm going to get Doctor Thomas."

"No, we don't need Doctor Thomas." Sam argued as Danni raised a questioning eyebrow. "She must be busy, I mean, she has lots of patients to take care of. Like you said, 'you have lots of sick patients'..." She sighed when Danni's expression didn't change. "Please, couldn't you just clean it up and put a band-aid on it or something?"

Danni pretended to think for a minute. "Nope, I'm going to get Doctor Thomas."

Sam's shoulders slumped in defeat after Danni left the room. "Ann's going to freak."

"Ann?" Leo was intrigued. "What is the deal with you and that doctor anyway?"

"Why there's nothing much, I mean, aside from the part that she saved my life of course."

"Saved your life? You mean like the last time you were shot?"

"Yeah, I owe her,"

"You bet you do."

Sam pulled the gauze away and looked at her arm. "I owe her in more ways than one," She mumbled under her breath.

"Sounds like you have more than a professional relationship going on. Am I correct?"

"Why do you ask?"

"God, Sam, you looked like some white knight carrying her out of here in your arms earlier." Just then the light bulb in Leo's brain glowed brighter. "You slept with her, didn't you?" Leo watched as his sister paled and it spurred him on to tease her even further. "And you liked it."

Sam could feel the heat of a blush coming up her neck. "Oh no," Sam shook her head in an attempt to stop it. "I spent the last two hours brushing off Mark's questions and I'm not going to-

"So, Mark's onto it too. It must be true." Leo's eyes widened as Sam's shoulders slumped in admission. "Shit Sam, can you please wait until she discharges me before you dump her?"

"Dump her?"

"Yeah, because I can think of too many painful and unnecessary exams she can order just to get even."

"You're an ass. I'm not dumping her."

Too absorbed in his on outrageous thoughts, Leo rambled on. "First she'll want to check my prostate, then she'll order a colonoscopy or a barium enema before she sends me for a consult with a proctolo-" Sam's words finally hit him. "What did you say?"

"I said...I'm not dumping her."

"That's what you always do, so why not now?" He looked more confused than he was right after the explosion. "What's wrong with her?"

"Don't you mean what's RIGHT with her?"

"Huh?" Leo shook his head then tapped his ear several times with his hand as if to dislodge something in it. "I don't think I heard you right."

Sam chuckled at his lack of eloquence. "I think...I think I'm in love with her, Leo."

Leo's jaw dropped. "I-I'm...I'm speechless."

"So was I brother, from the moment I realized that she was real I was speechless too."

Leo shook his head in bewildered amazement. "Damn! She got to you, didn't she?"

"Yes, she did. Somehow she busted right through the walls I've built around my heart like a bulldozer on a mission to destroy."

"I know what you mean, I've noticed a few cracks in mine too lately," Leo confided as they shared a complicit moment.

From outside the door, Danni nearly melted after hearing Sam's declaration. She felt so happy for her best friend that she couldn't stop a grin to envelope her face.

"It's not nice to eavesdrop."

Danni jumped back. "I wasn't eavesdropping."

"Yes you were," Ann teased. "Heard anything interesting?"

"Maybe," Danni grasped Ann's arm and stepped away from the door. "Can I ask you something?"

Ann's brow furrowed at the sudden seriousness on Danni's voice. "Sure."

"Are you sure about you and Sam?"

"What do you mean?"

"This relationship...I know that you're in love with her, but it's a big change and-"

"Do you think I'm experimenting?"

"Are you?"

"I've asked myself that question a couple of the times and... I can't explain it Danni, but somehow I feel that Sam is the one true love that I didn't even realize I was waiting for." Ann admitted honestly. "She's so much more than just a fling. Sam is someone I could grow old with. It sounds crazy because technically we don't even know each other that well, but I know she's the one, and I'm not afraid to fight for her love." Ann offered a shy smile. "Does that make any sense?"

"Totally." Danni let out a satisfied breath and glanced at Leo's room. "Hey, Ann, you don't have to come by my place tonight. I think I just got all the answers that I needed."

Ann looked quizzically at her. "So, you paged me for some girl talk?"

"Nope. Actually I paged you because the love of your life has a flesh wound that is bleeding out and she insists it's just a scratch."

"What? Where is she?"

Danni stepped away from the door and pointed toward Leo's room.

A mixture of fear, concern, and done-right outrage crossed over Ann's features before she rushed unceremoniously inside.

"Sam, Danni said you've been hurt." Ann visually checked Sam searching for any sign of distress. "What happened?"

Startled by the sudden entrance, Sam motioned to the arm that she was still putting pressure on. "Like I told Nurse Tattletale, it is nothing."

Ann grasped Sam's arm and gently removed the gauze to examine the wound. "God, were you shot again?"

"Maybe," Sam admitted sheepishly. "I went to arrest our friend, Sergeant Pain-in-the-ass and he put up a little bit of a fight."

Ann cleaned some of the blood so she could have a better view of the wound. "It doesn't seem to need stitches, but it definitely is not a scratch." She sent a disapproving look at Sam. "Sit down and let me take care of it."

Obediently, Sam did as instructed and took a seat on a stool nearby.

"Hello Leo," Ann acknowledged her other patient in the room as she gathered a few supplies. "How's the head?"

"I think I might need to have it checked out again."

Ann looked concerned. "Why?"

"I think I must have really cracked my skull." Leo alternated his gaze between the two women. "Things seem a little screwy if you know what I mean."

Sensing her brother's goofiness, Sam offered her own opinion. "Don't worry Ann, he's fine." She glared at Leo. "He's just being an ass." She then rolled the stool closer to his bed and whispered to his ear. "Behave or I'll suggest that you have your head up your ass and it needs further investigation."

He gulped at Sam's sneer. "I'll be good."

Standing for what seemed to be an eternity in front of the Unit Clerk's desk watching people cough, cry, bleed, and scream out in gut wrenching agony was enough to remind Sam that there was more to a hospital than cute blonde doctors.

"Okay gorgeous, I need your autograph here, here, here, and here." Oscar displayed a flashy show of white teeth as he pointed to the X marked spaces on the discharge papers in front of Sam.

"Only if you give me a pen, I've already lost enough blood for one day." Sam mimicked his antics.

"I bet those blue eyes would get you anything, don't they?"

"Like you have no idea," She winked before taking the pen he was offering.

"There, all done now?"

"As far as I'm concerned," Oscar said retrieving the completed papers. "You're free to go."

"Till the bill comes in the mail," Sam muttered as she reached for her vibrating cell phone.

"Matthews."

"Hey there partner, how are you doing?"

"Fine, I'm all patched up." Sam returned the pen to Oscar, mouthed a 'thank you', folded the papers he gave her, and then started walking toward the exit.

"Did the doctor kiss your boo-boo better?"

Sam's mind drifted from the conversation when she spied Ann sitting on the bench outside the hospital.

"What, no smart ass comeback?" He waited but still no answer. *"Sam, did you here what I said? Sam, are you there?"*

"Sorry, I...ah...I got a little distracted. Hey, shouldn't you be interrogating Miller or something?"

"There's bigger fish than me taking care of that now. We have two Assistant District Attorneys, Capitan Bennett and a couple of people from Internal Affairs in there with him."

Sam sat next to Ann and placed a chaste kiss on her cheek as she continued her conversation with Mark. "So, I assume he decided to cooperate then?"

"Not at first, but when A.D.A Covington offered him a nice choice between the gas chamber and lethal injection he started sweating."

"Covington has always been my favorite."

"Mine to. He cornered Miller's lawyer until he had no other choice than to work out a deal and that's when the bastard began to sing like a Belgian Canary."

"That's great news Mark." Sam stifled a yawn.

"Yeah, I thought so too. Anyway, are you going to stay with Leo all night?"

"No, mom's just arrived. She's going to spend the night here. I'm going home. You know I didn't have much sleep last night."

"Yeah, about that-"

"Goodbye Lieutenant." Sam flipped her cell phone off and turned to Ann. "Hi."

"Hi." Ann smiled broadly. "How is Lieutenant Stevens doing?"

"He's okay. Probably cursing me for letting him with all the paperwork on Miller's case, but he'll live."

"So what happens to Miller now?"

"That depends on how well he comes through with his end of the deal, but knowing Covington the way I do, I'm pretty sure he's going for life without parole."

"He deserves it for what he did to that woman and her child. He'll never see his mother again."

"He'll get more than he deserves considering prisoners don't usually take to well to being locked up with a cop." Sam seemed indifferent to Miller's fate. "But hey, he brought that on himself. Either way, you don't have to worry. He won't be bothering you again."

"Or that little boy for that matter, thanks to you and your partner," Ann stood up and bowed playfully. "I bow to men and women in blue. You're my heroes."

"Torn clothed heroes maybe." Sam laughed as she poked her finger through the hole in her sleeve. "So, are you done for the day?"

"Yes, I wasn't even on call today, don't you remember?" Ann said zipping up her jacket. "I came here only to put out a fire, and now that things are under control, I guess I'll go home. You know, I didn't have much sleep last night either." She sent a teasing wink at Sam as she started walking away.

Sam melted. Her heart was beating so fast that she was afraid it would burst.

God, I love you.

"Hey, wait!" Sam stood up and followed after Ann. "Did you talk to my mother?"

"About what?" Ann started to panick.

"About Leo, of course."

"Oh, Leo, of course." Ann sighed in relief.

Sam looked suspiciously at her.

"No, I didn't talk to your mother. I assigned Leo's case to the doctor on duty he'll explain everything to her."

"Oh, okay." Sam diverted her eyes and it was Ann's turn to look questionably at her.

"Did **you** talk to your mother?"

"Yes."

"Did you...tell her about us?"

"Uh, not yet." Sam said sheepishly.

"What's the matter, are you ashamed of me?" Ann lightly bumped Sam with her shoulder.

"No." Sam stated firmly.

"Then why didn't you?"

"Let's just say that I've already made my major announcement for the day. At least let me get use to the idea before we go blabbing it to the world."

"Aw, how sweet," Ann teased. "You want to keep me all to yourself for a while."

Sam grinned. "You bet I do. By the way, are we still on for tonight?"

"Of course," Ann smiled devilishly. "The only question is...my place or yours?"

"You didn't change your mind?" Sam threw the question out half seriously.

"Change my mind about what?"

"About me..." Sam motioned with her finger between the two of them. "About us...you know," she snickered rather naughtily.

"Why would I do that?"

"I don't know. Sometimes the whole gay thing can be a little hard to face. I'd understand if you did."

"It's funny I just had this same conversation with my best friend. Do you know what I told her?"

Sam shook her head and looked expectantly to Ann.

"I told her I'm not some college girl having a lesbian affair for the sake of experimenting. I really like what we have," she said seriously.

Sam grinned. "Me, too. I mean I'm glad."

Ann laughed. "Speaking of my best friend, do you know what she wanted to talk about?"

"The dirty details?" Sam teased with a raised eyebrow.

"No." Ann slapped Sam's good arm playfully. "Your brother."

Sam's other eyebrow joined the first raised one. "My brother, as in 'my brother Leo'?"

"Uh-huh." Ann nodded.

"Ok, I'll bite." Sam stopped and stood facing Ann. "What does my brother have to do with your best friend?"

"She thinks he's cute." Ann managed to keep a straight face.

Sam crossed her arms totally aware that Ann was enjoying the game. "And how does she know Leo?"

Ann chuckled and decided to drop the cryptic talk. "She's the nurse taking care of him."

"The bossy Amazon?" Sam asked a little surprised.

"I'll agree with the bossy, but Amazon?"

"Curly-blond hair, tough-looking..."

"Oh yeah, that's her. That's Danni." Ann pondered her friend for a moment. "Yeah, I could see why you'd call her Amazon."

"I see." Sam bit the inside of her cheek as they resumed walking.

"So, what do you think, maybe we could go out on a double date?"

"Ah, thanks but no, thanks." Sam shook her head. "I don't get involved in my brother's love life."

"Really? I'd think you'd have nothing but his best interest at heart."

Sam thought for a moment. "Well, does running interference for him count?"

Ann gave her a stern look. "Not if you're dating me, it doesn't."

"Am I dating you?" Sam stopped abruptly and looked at Ann. "I thought we were past that stage." She offered softly.

Ann's face lit up. "So, we're going steady, huh?"

"Something like that." Sam nodded before sliding her arm around Ann's waist and pulling her in for a kiss that would seal the foothold on their new relationship.

"Yeah," Ann considered the myriad of sensations that Sam's kiss had sent swirling around her body and seared the memory into her brain. "We're definitely going steady."

The End.